INDONESIA

ARCHIPELAGO OF FEAR

ANDRE VLTCHEK

FOREWORD BY NOAM CHOMSKY

Andre Vltchek
December 1963 - September 2020

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements *ix*
Foreword by Noam Chomsky *xiii*

1 Introduction **1**

2 From colony to dictatorship **16**
Colonialism 16
Independence 17
The Sukarno era 20
Elites in Indonesian history 26
The coup of 1965 28
Genocide 29
The New Order 38

3 Extreme capitalism, Indonesian style **40**
The illusion of economic success 42
The collapse of intellectual Indonesia 45
The aftermath of the Asian financial crisis 47
A fog of statistics 53
Poverty in Indonesia 57
Bali 61
Jakarta 65
Living in Jakarta 70

4 Democracy and human rights **73**
The democracy of generals 74
How much does their vote really matter? 78
After Suharto stepped down 81
Giving in to the Almighty 86
How information is manipulated via the media 90
The legal system 95
Prisons, torture and extra-judicial killings 99
Women's rights 103

5 Jakarta bleeding the islands **110**
Racism on the rise while there is no chance for independence 110

A neocolonial empire 114
Chinese exile 115
Genocide in Papua 116
Timor-Leste 122
Aceh 127
Kalimantan 132

6 Corruption kills 138
Suharto – the father of Indonesian corruption 140
Mud lake – tip of the corruption iceberg? 144
Some examples of corruption cases 148
If you are corrupt, go all the way 149

7 The environment, plundering of natural resources and consequent natural disasters 152
Filth and pollution 155
The River Musi and Palembang, Sumatra 156
North Sumatra 161
Aceh after the tsunami 164
Kalimantan 167
The Norwegian initiative 168

8 Collapse of infrastructure 171
Ferries sink 172
Airplanes crash 173
Terrible roads 174
Rotting trains 175
City transport problems 177
Inadequate services 178

9 Islam 182
Getting away with violence 187
Getting away with murder: the horror of Cikeusik 192
Temanggung 195
Pasuruan 197
The West, clerics and Indonesian Islam 197

10 Culture, education and intellectual life 202
Education 205
The arts 211
Artists and intellectuals 213
Remembering a lost culture 218

11 Indonesia's position in Southeast Asia 219
A big but destitute bully 219
A regional victim and victimizer 221
The region is benefiting from the Indonesian collapse 222
The region benefits from Indonesian corruption 224
Run if you can, but send money home 225
Comparing apples and rotten apples 227

12 Conclusion 230

Notes 235
Index 247

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Andre Vltchek

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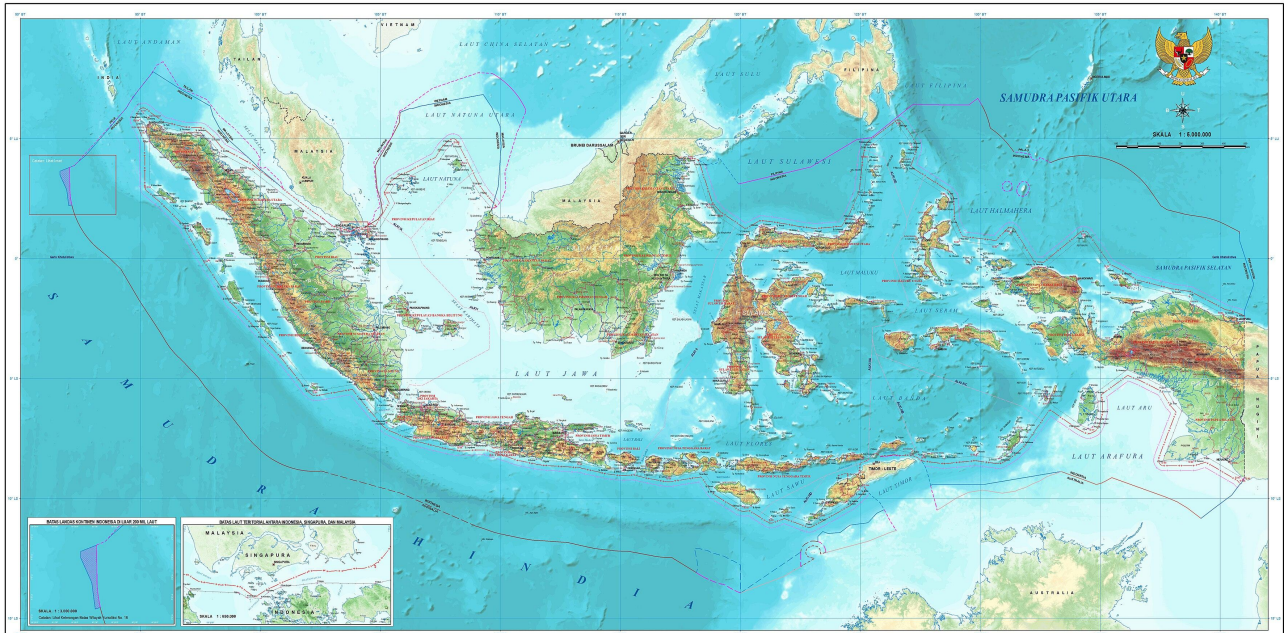

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N.	Nusa
Sel.	Selat
Tg.	Tanjung
G.	Gunung
K.	Kepulauan
Sn.	Sungai
D.	Danau
Mt.	Muara

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PETA NEGARA KESATUAN REPUBLIK INDONESIA

Peta ini menggambarkan wilayah kedaulatan Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia di darat dan laut, baik berupa laut territorial (laut wilayah), perairan kepulauan, dan perairan pedalaman, serta hak berdaulat Indonesia di Zona Tambahan, Zona Ekonomi Eksklusif, dan Landas Kontinen, yang penetapannya ditetapkan atau akan ditetapkan Pemerintah Indonesia dan batasnya harus berupa batasan sebagai mana diatur dalam Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 43 Tahun 2008 tentang Wilayah Negara, yang telah disepakati oleh Pemerintah Indonesia dan Negara yang telah disepakati oleh Pemerintah Indonesia dan Negara yang telah disepakati oleh Pemerintah Indonesia dan Negara

FOREWORD

Andre Vltchek has compiled a stunning record in evoking the reality of the contemporary world, not as perceived through the distorting prisms of power and privilege, but as lived by the myriad victims. He has also not failed to trace the painful – and particularly for the West, shameful – realities to their historical roots. The remarkable scope of his inquiries is illustrated even by the titles of some of his major books: *Western Terror: From Potosi to Baghdad,* a vast range of topics that he explores with rare insight and understanding; and *Exile*, his interviews with Indonesia's great novelist Pramoedya, who spent a large part of his life in internal exile, imprisoned by the murderous and vicious Suharto government in Indonesia, which was greatly admired by the West, and enthusiastically supported in its shocking crimes, after it won approval by carrying out a mass slaughter that the CIA compared to the crimes of Hitler, Stalin, and Mao, and opened up the rich resources of the country to Western exploitation.

In the present work, Vltchek brings together decades of research on Indonesia, where he has visited dozens of the islands in the archipelago, some very remote, and interviewed scores of its people. The story he has to tell of brutality, corruption and environmental destruction is shocking – and is in stark contrast to the image of Indonesia conveyed by the mainstream media of a democratic and largely tolerant country.

Why is Indonesia portrayed this way by the West, and by the United States in particular? What does the West gain by supporting the regime? One needs to understand the place of the Asia-Pacific region within US geopolitical strategy during the Cold War to appreciate why the United States supported General Suharto in the coup that overthrew the secular government of Indonesia led by President Sukarno, and turned a blind eye to the horrific massacres that followed, and has continued to support the ruling regime ever since.

During the Second World War, high-level US planners understood

very well that the United States would emerge from the war as the world-dominant power, replacing Britain, and far outstripping the role that Britain had played at the height of its power; in fact, taking on a position of world dominance with no precedent. They produced careful and sophisticated studies about how to organize a world in which the United States was expected to have 'assumed, out of self-interest, responsibility for the welfare of the world capitalist system,' to borrow the words of the senior historian of the CIA, Gerald Haines, also a highly regarded academic diplomatic historian. Crucial to these plans was the reconstruction of the industrial economies of Europe and Japan, but now within the framework of US global dominance.

Each area of the world was assigned its 'function' in this global planning. The 'main function' of Southeast Asia was to provide resources and raw material to the former colonial powers. The United States would also purchase them, paying with dollars, which would not benefit the countries but would be recycled to the colonial masters, thus enabling them to absorb the huge US manufacturing surplus and overcoming the 'dollar gap' by 'triangular trade,' a crucial and sophisticated component of post-war planning. The same developments opened the way for US investment in European economies, the origin of the modern multinational corporations, as the business press and official US government documents recognize. The Marshall Plan also contributed to these ends, though the vast military spending from the early 1950s made a far greater contribution. These were major concerns of the postwar years.

In Asia, Japan was to be granted its 'Empire towards the South,' as explained by the head of the State Department Policy Planning Staff, George Kennan – in effect, the New Order it had attempted to construct in Asia by conquest, but now under US control, therefore unproblematic. Indonesia, because of its enormous resources, had a special role in these plans. In 1948, Kennan described 'the problem of Indonesia' as 'the most crucial issue of the moment in our struggle with the Kremlin.' There was no 'Kremlin' anywhere in sight in the literal sense, but invocation of the Kremlin, Mao, and 'communism' is a standard cover for concern over indigenous nationalism. As Kennan explained, 'Indonesia is the anchor in that chain of islands stretching from Hokkaido to Sumatra which we should develop as a politico-economic counter-force to communism' and as a 'base area for possible [US] military action beyond.' An independent Indonesia could become an 'infection' that 'would sweep westward' through all of South Asia, Kennan warned, even threatening US control of

the world's major energy resources in the Middle East. Those fears grew through the 1950s, as Sukarno's Indonesia became too democratic, even allowing political participation of the PKI, which 'had won widespread support not as a revolutionary party but as an organization defending the interests of the poor within the existing system,' developing a 'mass base among the peasantry' through its 'vigor in defending the interests of the … poor.'[1] That rang alarm bells in Washington.

These were also the major concerns behind the US wars in Indochina. It was feared that an independent Vietnam might also become an 'infection' that would sweep through the region, as far as Indonesia, finally leading Japan to 'accommodate' to independent Asian mainland economies, becoming their industrial heartland. That would mean, in effect, that the United States had lost the Pacific phase of the Second World War, a consequence that it was quite unwilling to contemplate in the 1950s and 1960s – or today, for that matter. This is the rational core of the 'domino theory.' It had already been articulated in the late 1940s with regard to Europe, where the anti-fascist resistance had great prestige, and there were concerns that anti-fascist forces, the labor movement, and in some countries like Greece peasant-based forces as well, might undermine the effort to restore something closely resembling the traditional system of business domination, often with fascist and Nazi collaborators.

There was also a version of the 'domino theory' for the public: Ho Chi Minh would get into a canoe, paddle to California, and rape your grandmother. But the serious version of the domino theory was well understood internally, and never abandoned, because it was quite rational.

In Vietnam, the United States dealt with the threat of 'infection' in a rational way: the 'infection was cured' by demolishing Vietnam, and the region was 'inoculated' by installation of brutal and vicious military regimes that prevented the spread of the infection. The strategy was largely successful. It is commonly held that the United States 'lost' the Vietnam War. The business world knew better, pretty clearly by about 1970. The United States 'lost' the war only in the sense that it did not achieve its maximal objective of turning Vietnam into a disciplined client state, though it did achieve its major war aims of undermining the threat of successful independent development and blocking the spread of the infection. The same policies have been followed in much of the world, with general success, leaving a trail of hideous atrocities, death, and destruction, and great

acclaim on the part of the intellectual classes for Washington's dedication to the idealistic and altruistic goals of bringing democracy, human rights, and freedom to suffering masses everywhere. These are normal concomitants of enormous power, throughout history.

To fend off the dangers of democracy and 'infection' in Indonesia, President Eisenhower carried out a major clandestine operation in 1958 in support of a military rebellion that tried to split off from Indonesia the regions where most of the resource wealth is concentrated. This effort failed, and the United States turned to more indirect means to overthrow the Sukarno regime, among them supporting elements of the military that might carry out an eventual internal coup; again, standard operating procedure, and often successful. The Suharto coup and the ensuing 'staggering mass slaughter' (as the *New York Times* editors described it) were therefore welcomed with unconcealed euphoria in the West. They were 'a gleam of light in Asia,' to quote the headline of a delighted column by the leading liberal columnist of the *Times*, James Reston. The major mass-based party in Indonesia (the communist PKI) was smashed, warding off the threat of democracy, and the country was thrown open to Western exploitation, becoming a 'paradise for investors.' Furthermore, the elimination of the Sukarno government destroyed one of the pillars of the hated non-aligned movement (aligned with neither the United States nor the Soviet Union).A second pillar, Nasser's Egypt, was eliminated two years later by Israel, establishing the US–Israel military-economic alliance in its contemporary form.

The US attitude towards the non-aligned movement was extremely hostile from the outset, and still is. The reasons go back to the fundamentals of wartime planning, which sought to create a world system that would be open to US economic penetration (investment, resource extraction) and political control. It follows at once that any form of independent development is a threat. The non-aligned movement sought to bring together the former colonies, with hopes of becoming an independent force in world affairs, separating themselves from the superpower confrontation and pursuing their own interests rather than those of the former colonial masters. That was a direct interference with the global planning centered in Washington, but including the other rich industrial societies to a large extent, because of largely shared interests, despite some conflicts.

US political leaders regarded the non-aligned movement as deeply immoral, virtually a front for the Soviet Union, whether consciously or not. Nehru was bitterly denounced as irrational, immature, with

a paranoid fear of 'domination by whites' (sheer paranoia, of course, given India's history). The basic reason was his effort to develop an independent 'zone of peace' as part of the broader non-aligned movement. Nasser was condemned by Dulles and others as a new Hitler, who intended to destroy the West by taking control of the world's major energy resources. There was no rational concern that Middle East oil would be withheld from the international market, but rather that the wealth it generated would be used for domestic development instead of flowing to the United States, the United Kingdom (primarily) and the pockets of the local clients, and that the United States would be deprived of the 'stupendous source of strategic power' that control of these resources provides. The idea that Nasser could exert such strategic power transcended paranoia. Sukarno raised similar fears.

The Eisenhower administration, in internal discussion, identified three major world crises: the Middle East (with Nasser as the culprit), Indonesia (with Sukarno playing the role of a villain), and North Africa (the issue of Algeria): all oil producers, all secular Islamic regions. The North African crisis was overcome with Algerian independence; France gradually regained a dominant role in its former colony, including, it appears, significant responsibility for the horrendous massacres of the 1990s. Israel took care of Nasser, establishing the US–Israel relationship that has grown since. And Suharto took care of Indonesia, turning it into a 'paradise for investors,' after disposing of those who might impede the 'rational' socioeconomic program of subordination to their needs.

The United States was committed not only to eliminating the pillars of the non-aligned movement, but also to undermining any residual role the movement might later play in world affairs. And the movement did persist, even after the destruction of Nasser and Sukarno, and marginalization of India. After decolonization, the United Nations appeared to offer opportunities for initiatives to respond to the needs of the South, and was no longer a well-disciplined instrument of US power. Accordingly, from the mid-1960s the United States began to undermine the organization. One illustration is vetoes. From the mid-1960s, the United States took the lead in vetoing Security Council resolutions, on a wide range of issues, with the United Kingdom well behind in second place, and no one else even close.

The United States also devoted itself to undermining other UN organizations that might contribute to the independent development of the former colonies. In the late 1960s, UNCTAD proposed plans

for a 'New World Economic Order' that would focus on needs and interests of the South. Any such ideas were quickly squelched. A new economic order was constructed, but not that one; rather, it was the neoliberal order (mislabelled 'globalization') that responds to the demands of the Western multinationals and financial institutions. UNCTAD was reduced from a serious UN planning body to a study group that produces research that the powerful mostly disregard. A few years later, UNESCO sought to initiate a 'New Information Order' that would provide the South with some role, however small, in international communications. That aroused near-hysteria in the United States, with a huge wave of fabrication about efforts by third world authoritarians to destroy freedom of speech and other fantasies, which were quickly refuted but without any effect (even when publication was allowed).

The non-aligned movement (G-77, with now over 130 members, including 80 per cent of the world's population) had its highest-level meetings ever in 2000, at Cartagena and a Havana Summit of heads of state. Its careful and sophisticated analysis of the international order received a few derisive phrases. Even bare mention of it sufficed to elicit an amusing tantrum from a Cambridge University historian. Commentators and scholars solemnly inform us that the 'international community' supported the bombing of Serbia – meaning that it was only opposed by India, China, Latin America, Africa and other 'unpeople,' to borrow British diplomatic historian Mark Curtis's apt phrase for the West's traditional victims. There is a long series of assassinated countries that have tried to seek independence, but have been unceremoniously crushed, including democracies that sought an escape from traditional subordination and misery. These are central themes of Cold War history, supplemented by Russia's rather similar operations within its much narrower domains – with the same pretense of defense against the superpower enemy.

As noted earlier, another deficiency of Sukarno's Indonesia was that it was too democratic, even permitting participation of the party of the poor. The US embassy in Jakarta cabled to Washington in 1958 that the Sukarno government was 'beginning to reach conclusion that the communists could not be beaten by ordinary democratic means in elections. Program of gradual elimination of Communists by police and military to be followed by outlawing of Communist Party [is] not unlikely in comparatively near future.' The US Joint Chiefs of Staff, the same day, urged that 'action must be taken, including overt measures as required, to insure either the success of the dissidents or the suppression of the pro-communist

elements of the Sukarno government.' The 'dissidents' were the high military officers leading a rebellion, with extensive US support, to strip off the outer islands where US investments and resources were concentrated. Sukarno was unreliable: he might not conduct the 'elimination' of 'unpeople' that was finally carried out by Suharto.

The continuity of planning, with tactical adjustments and new pretexts as circumstances change, is not at all surprising. Planning is rooted in institutions, and these have remained basically stable in the United States and allied states, which largely rule the international order, even though never without disruption.

After the coup, quite naturally, the United States and other Western powers supported Suharto with great pleasure, lauding him as a 'moderate' who was 'at heart benign'[2] as he competed for the world record in atrocities and war crimes, and easily took the prize for corruption awarded by the international monitoring organization, Transparency International. He was 'our kind of guy,' the Clinton administration announced happily a few years before he committed his first real crime: losing control and dragging his feet on IMF orders, and thus making the transition to a 'bad guy' who had to be replaced. Some, however, maintained their admiration for him, notably Paul Wolfowitz, who is hailed by the liberal press as the 'idealist-in-chief in charge of Bush's "noble vision" of bringing democracy to the Middle East.'[3]

The enthusiasm over the Suharto coup and its aftermath was perfectly normal, and easily understandable, much like the reaction to similar developments elsewhere. For example, in Latin America at the same time the Kennedy administration was deeply concerned about a mildly populist and reformist democratic government in Brazil, the most important power of the region, and therefore sponsored a military coup that installed the first of the neo-Nazi National Security states. The achievement was hailed by high Kennedy-Johnson administration officials as 'the greatest victory for freedom in the mid-twentieth century.' The dominoes soon began to fall elsewhere, as country after country fell under the terror of National Security states and the hemisphere suffered a plague of violence and oppression, reaching Central America in the terrible decade of the 1980s. Apart from some occasional signs of displeasure if violence and terror became too well publicized, the victories for freedom and democracy were celebrated with enthusiasm by Western elites, at the time and in retrospect.

In brief, there is nothing surprising about the US involvement in Suharto's takeover in Indonesia and its horrendous aftermath, or the

reaction to it on the part of Western elite opinion as long as he was carrying out his 'functions' properly. It all fits well into the general pattern of contemporary history. It takes no particular insight to understand what happened. On the contrary, it takes considerable discipline not to understand.

Noam Chomsky

1

INTRODUCTION

A grey stream cuts through the fields just outside the city of Bandung. It is polluted with chemicals, its surface covered by plastic bags, bottles and other floating rubbish. Nearby, there is a small cemetery. Kids in rags besiege it – they come here to beg and to extract money from the mourners. When a few small notes are passed to them, the children usually move aside, only to return a few minutes later.

This toxic stream could be anywhere in Indonesia, and so could the battered surface of the road, the cemetery facing the rice field and the street children of unidentified age, cigarettes hanging from their mouths. Misery, pollution and decay, cities without parks and sidewalks – at the lower and wider end everything seems to be standardized in this vast archipelago. Also standardized is the 'upper end' of the cities and suburbs – the shopping malls and chain restaurants, the luxury vehicles of the super-rich (almost all in two colours – black and silver), the monstrous pseudo-Roman villas and the pop music from the 1960s and 1970s.

Also standardized is fear.

Could conscious or subconscious fear paralyse an entire nation to its core? Could it force hundreds of millions of men, women and children into servility, breaking their will to rebel, to fight, and to dream of a better society and future?

Could the recollection of horrors from the distant and not-too-distant past (or the imagination of horrors, passed from generation to generation in a twisted way through state propaganda) silence the great majority of citizens? And if at least a few members of almost every family have participated in one slaughter or another, or in all of them, could their uncertainty about the future, and their inherent shame as well as the fear of justice and potential

retribution, make most Indonesian families desperately cling to the existing system and to the sandcastle of lies; make them silently wish for every call for justice and truth to be destroyed as brutally and promptly as possible?

Between 1965 and 2011, in less than five decades, Indonesia carried out at least three major genocides. All of them are discussed in detail in this book. It may not be the worst record in the world – the Western nations indisputably hold that position – but it is unprecedented on the Asian continent.

General Suharto, and a faction of his military and religious cadres, conducted the 1965 military coup and consequent massacres, although they were orchestrated and strongly supported by Washington. Between 500,000 and 3 million communists, intellectuals, artists, teachers, trade union leaders and members of the Chinese minority were killed. In 1975, the occupation of East Timor (now Timor-Leste) and the liquidation of around 30 per cent of the people of that nation followed. Then came the still ongoing onslaught in Papua, in which at least 120,000 people have already died.

These were only the most brutal and radical events. Aceh, Ambon, several areas of Sulawesi and other parts of the country have all also suffered a terrible fate.

In 1965–66, millions of ordinary Indonesians participated in genocidal events. At that time, the country had only around 100 million inhabitants, and on the island of Java and other islands of the archipelago extended families could have as many as 200 members. Even if the number of victims was 'only' 500,000 (the lowest of the estimates), that would mean an average of one victim per family. Of course, the victims were not as evenly spread across the society as this implies, but even so, an enormous number of families included at least one victim and at least one perpetrator.

Perhaps this explains why 'People talk about these killings with distaste rather than outraged condemnation', as Andrew Beatty, the well-known anthropologist and Indonesian scholar, wrote.

In 1975, the occupation of East Timor and the resulting slaughter and destruction of its tiny population was carried out mainly by the military (with several current top Indonesian political figures, including President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and General Wiranto, serving as senior officers). Migrants from the islands of Java and Sumatra, predominantly Muslim, also supported and participated in the slaughter and the policies of targeting the native population. In Papua too, the responsibility for the terrible deeds (mass killing, torture, rape, disappearances and forced Islamization

to name just a few of the crimes against humanity) should burden the conscience of the military, opportunistic migrants and ordinary Indonesians, as well as multinational mining and logging enterprises and other conglomerates.

The subtitle of this book is 'Archipelago of fear'. Fear is a very powerful force in Indonesia. There are many different types of fear. Some are related to the past and to violence, and others to corruption. There is the fear of being exposed, of being punished, and of losing face. There is the fear of admitting to the world one's victimhood. There is the fear of belonging to a minority – racial, ethnic or religious – as in Indonesia the majority rules no matter what, often reasserting its dominance by brutalizing and oppressing minorities.

There are other fears, seemingly of lesser rank but still very powerful. There is the fear of not amassing enough money and resources, and falling into destitution in this country where there is almost no security net and very little compassion. There is fear of crime, and fear of the notoriously corrupt law-enforcement machinery and the judiciary.

There is the fear of falling ill, as Indonesia has some of the most terrible and overpriced healthcare systems in Asia, forcing millions of those who can afford it to fly across the Straits of Malacca to Singapore or to Malaysia, where they can get better and cheaper treatment. Sick people who remain in Indonesia face incompetence, misdiagnoses, mounting bills and often a painful death.

There is also a fear of saying or writing that medical care and other social services are a shambles, as citizens can face defamation charges for a wide range of minor 'offences', so this kind of criticism can be severely punished. 'A range of journalists and activists who have taken on the entrenched political or economic interests have been subjected to criminal defamation charges. Everyday acts – such as complaining about treatment received at a hospital or asking a local official about a land assessment – can result in a defamation prosecution and a prison sentence', wrote the British *Daily Telegraph* on July 11, 2011.

There is the fear of not being religious enough – not showing enough zeal or not fasting or praying when others do. People worry that they might not appear nationalistic enough. There is terrible fear for those who are gay or lesbian – fear of being exposed, fear of not being like other people, and the fear of embarrassing, or even ruining, their family. And there is a broader fear of thinking differently from the majority, having different habits, or being exposed for knowing too much or too little.

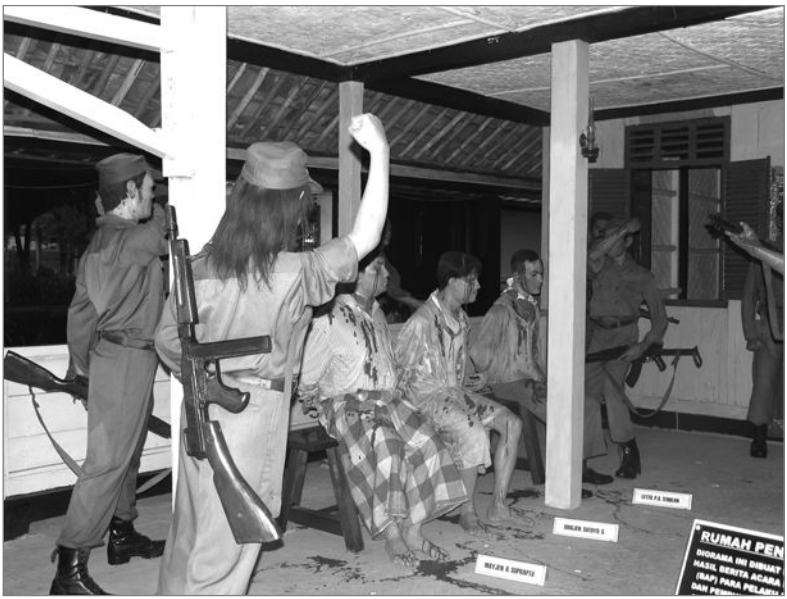

Photo 1.1 Anti-communist propaganda at Lubang Buaya: a diorama depicting the alleged communist killing of the generals in 1965

In hierarchical Indonesia, people are entirely obedient to their parents. Elder members of the family have to be loved unconditionally, obeyed and admired; never questioned. Most children on Java regularly kiss their parents' hands. A wife has to be obedient to her husband, and of course to her parents. People always obey the authorities – the military, police, government and the company management. When talking to them, Indonesians are expected to be humble and extremely polite. Parents and authorities are feared. Religious leaders are feared. Neighbours are feared. Thugs are feared.

The list of fears is endless. The nation seems to be united in its diversity of fears!

Then there is shame. In Indonesia, shame is a mutant of fear, and it comes in a wide variety of forms. There is personal shame: of having been a victim, slapped, raped or tortured. There is inherited shame: of having a father or mother who has been a victim. There is the shame of belonging to a minority that has been victimized. There is a shame of being too weak, and therefore defenceless.

Mount Lawu in Central Java rises from a plush green tropical

countryside of rice fields, creeks and traditional sleepy villages with red roofs. In 1972, the influential scholar Benedict Anderson took to the road with his Vespa scooter, briefly stopping at the ancient city of Surakarta (also known as Solo) and visiting Suharto's family tomb. Later he wrote:

> In 1971, the Indonesian presidential machine informed the public that Suharto and his wife were planning a mausoleum for themselves on a spur of Mount Lawu, the dormant, 3,000 m sacred volcano that lies to the east of the ci-devant royal Javanese city of Surakarta. The site had been carefully chosen, respectfully situated some metres below the early tombs of the Mangkunegaran dynasty – the second most insignificant of the four small Central Java principalities instituted by colonial authority in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Mrs Tien Suharto – by then already quietly mocked as Tientje (Ten Per Cent) – claimed some connection with the little dynasty which had barely survived the revolution of 1945–49. For Suharto, who always insisted that he was of simple peasant stock, but was rumoured to be the illegitimate son of a Chinese tycoon, the site represented a social step up; and a normal one, since hypergamy was common among the army officer corps in the 1940s and after, and families were traditionally uxorilocal. Still, the construction of this expensive, unprecedented mausoleum for the future dead had something creepy about it, since Suharto himself was a healthy 50-year-old at the time.[1]

I visited Mount Lawu and Suharto's tomb only few months after the most corrupt dictator of modern times had found his resting place there. The parking lot was almost full, and in a country with a collapsed infrastructure and almost no money to spend on roads and railroads, there was a surprisingly huge construction in progress just a few hundred metres from the mausoleum – a new parking area had been literally carved out of the mountain.

On the day of my visit, soldiers were guarding the compound and aggressive vendors were stalking the pilgrims. The electricity system in the area had broken down, throwing the interior of the mausoleum into almost complete darkness. Only a few candles illuminated the tombs and the large photographs of the general and his wife, as well as the photos of his neatly framed military medals. A gang of photographers with Polaroid cameras was working in that

space, taking snapshots of Indonesian tourists posing near the tomb of their former leader. The atmosphere was eerie and at the same time Kafkaesque.

The sound of *dzikir* – reciting verses from Koran – came through the walls. Dozens of men in skullcaps and women with covered hair were praying outside the closed doors. Then there was an enormous commotion as a group of women escorted by plain-clothed cops entered the premises. In the middle of the flock was Sylvia Amelia Wenas, wife of the then speaker of the House, Agung Laksono. With her head covered and a large entourage, she had come to pay tribute to 'Pak Harto' (Suharto).

The ambience inside and around the mausoleum felt religious, and most likely it was meant to be so. During his reign, Suharto had elevated himself to the level of divinity. Now that religion was playing an increasingly significant role in Indonesia, it was only natural that the military leader and tyrant, who according to his regime's propaganda had saved Indonesia from 'atheism and communism', should be venerated as a pious follower of Islam, almost as a saint.

Two years later I revisited the site, accompanied by Rossie Indira and George Burchett, an Australian painter and the son of journalist Wilfred Burchett. After some complicated manoeuvres behind the scenes (I knew some famous dissidents who were related to Suharto's family), I was allowed to bring professional movie and still cameras with me. After *dzikir,* a large group of mostly elderly men with skullcaps and women in headscarves entered the tomb. They crept in on their knees, reciting prayers, with their eyes locked on the portrait of their dear dead leader. Then they prostrated themselves, freezing their old bodies into subservient positions that were designed to show tremendous humility and respect. In past centuries, this kind of prostration was reserved exclusively for Javanese kings.

I was both horrified and unsure what exactly I was witnessing. These were clearly Muslim prayers, but they were directed towards not a religious leader, but someone who had been arguably the most corrupt man in the world. Indonesia was increasingly insisting on religious purity, and I was genuinely unsure whether this was some new norm, or an indication of a deviant sect or practice.

For seemingly endless minutes, I filmed the scene: the photographs of the puffy face of the mass murderer and his framed medals; the old men and women effectively worshipping his ghost. Many of these individuals could have been held responsible for the

downfall of Indonesia, and all of them were evidently guilty at the least of supporting one of the most brutal fascist regimes in world history.

We descended from the heights where the mausoleum was built, and our route took us past a big elementary school (SD Negeri Matesih) in the town of Matesih. I stopped and spoke to some of the children. They had no doubts about the glorious nature of Suharto's rule. When we asked three girls whether they had ever heard any criticism of his reign, they looked dumbfounded. 'Pak Harto was a good leader of the people', they replied in unison. 'He knew how to make Indonesian people happy. We never heard anything bad about Pak Harto – good things only. Always. When he died and his body was brought through our town, school children were given umbrellas, new clothes and rice, and then they were ordered to line up along the road and bid him farewell.'

Observed from the heights of Mount Lawu, perhaps it genuinely seems that Indonesia has been doing well. Its people are content and grateful to the revered fatherly figure, General Suharto – the wise leader who brought prosperity, spirituality and happiness to his great, diverse and content nation. For decades, Western politicians and the media went out of their way to preserve such an image. Suharto, who was brought to power by the West, was always treated as a 'typical' Asian leader, authoritarian but within acceptable limits. He was scarcely criticized, and his genocidal actions in East Timor (now Timor-Leste), Papua and Aceh either went unmentioned or were benevolently endorsed. The fear – the unpronounced and often subconscious terror – that he sowed into the very soil of his island of Java, and later all over the vast archipelago, went generally undetected by the radars of Washington, Canberra, London and other friendly capitals.

Indonesia is the fourth most populous country in the world, covering vast expanses of land and sea. Compared with other large nations like China, India or Brazil, very little has been written about Indonesia except in its own language, Bahasa Indonesia. Statistics are often unavailable or appear to be inaccurate, or even contradictory. What is certain is that the Indonesian Republic (Republik Indonesia) is a colossus accommodating between 237 and 300 million people, living on around 922[2] permanently inhabited islands. There is not even a consensus on how many islands form the archipelago. The Indonesian Government estimates that there

are 17,508 to 18,306 islands in all, of which only 8,844 have been named so far.

Officially, Indonesia is a democracy. There are dozens of registered political parties, there is the parliament (with two houses, the People's Consultative Assembly – MPR – and the People's Representative Assembly – DPR) and, at least in theory, there is an independent judicial system.

In practice, the great majority of Indonesian citizens are legally unprotected and unrepresented. 'The Indonesian legal framework is based on political interests,' explained Hendardi, a lawyer and chairman of SETARA (the Institute for Democracy and Peace). 'In 1998, when there was a political change (*reformasi*), we hoped that there would be changes in the legal framework too, including upholding of the law. But what happened was that there was no real transition to new values, just a "change of clothing".'

The system is designed to serve a very small group of political, military and economic 'elites'. The legal system is ancient, inadequate, incomplete and full of loopholes, which are used to accommodate those who are in positions of power. Not even one political party represented in MPR and DPR truly bothers to defend the interests of the impoverished majority. As a rule, parties and representatives advance their own political and economic interests, and as a result the House (DPR) has a reputation as the most corrupt institution in the country – which is itself synonymous with endemic corruption.[3]

In such an imperfect society, it is amazing how perfectly designed the power system is. It provides bulletproof protection against discontent, protests, requests, enquiries and scrutiny by the citizens. Leaders are not expected to bow before the masses and reply to them. Uncomfortable questions are always ignored. There is almost no mechanism to bring to accountability either the elected representatives or private companies.

The current president of Indonesia is Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (known locally by the acronym SBY). He may be shedding popularity in even his uninformed nation, raised and fed on a diet of fascist propaganda, but he counts on firm support from the West. For years, he has been glorified as a democrat and reformer by the US establishment as well as by the great mass of Australian academia.

At home, almost no one looks to President Yudhoyono for substantial positive changes. Nor are many people shocked by his

military past – he was twice a student at the notorious US training establishment Fort Benning,[4] he was a platoon commander in occupied East Timor, and a general during Suharto's dictatorship. Almost nobody really analyses his engagements in Timor-Leste and elsewhere; many do not even know about them. The cliché is that he is predictable and boring. He is considered weak. But in fact he is powerful in his determined stubbornness, refusing to implement any significant reforms (including those in the judiciary which are essential for any progressive change in the country) in a society that moves by deadly and destructive inertia, even after Suharto stepped down in 1998.

Arguably inertia is what Washington, Canberra, London and almost all other Western capitals expect from Jakarta. Their priorities are the continued free flow of natural resources, as well as the upholding of the deals that were signed during the Suharto regime between foreign multinationals and the Indonesian state and its cronies. As a rule these deals were terribly unfavourable to Indonesia.

As Indonesian citizens are continuously robbed of the natural riches of their homeland, as the political establishment increasingly pushes the boundaries of the cynical charade it calls democracy, as there is almost nothing 'public' left in the country (not even water, parks or sidewalks), and as millions of women suffer from genital mutilation,[5] Western leaders stand firm in their support for one of the most oppressive systems in the world. So as a rule do the Western media.

'As I travel around the world over the next few years, I will be saying to people: if you want to know whether Islam, democracy, modernity and women's rights can co-exist, go to Indonesia,' declared US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, during her visit to Indonesia in February 2009. 'Barry from Menteng' – as President Barack Obama is known in Indonesia, where he spent his happy childhood in a military compound not long after the 'rivers of Java were clogged with corpses' (as I was told by the greatest Indonesian novelist, Pramoedya Ananta Toer) – had also only praise to offer during his visit to Indonesia in November 2010. Not a word about the colonial structure of Indonesia, where the most populous island in the world – Java – holds in its iron grip most of the archipelago, of which many islands would secede immediately if they were given the right to hold referenda (which are unthinkable, unconstitutional and illegal in 'democratic' Indonesia). Not a word about the ongoing slaughter of well over 100,000 Papuans.

And what about Indonesian Islam and democracy? After the massacres of 1965–66, and especially after Suharto stepped down in May 1998, the Western mass media and the political establishment began a powerful campaign describing Indonesia as a tolerant Muslim state and a vibrant democracy. This completely ignored the fact that extremist ideas from Saudi Arabia – mainly conservative Wahhabism – had infiltrated and taken firm root in this historically religiously relaxed archipelago. Churches are going up in flames, children from minority religions are being attacked, even Muslim sects that are not in favour are banned, and their members have been publicly lynched in front of an idle police. Political Islam is flexing its muscles, and an unconstitutional sharia law has been imposed in several parts of Java and Sumatra, including in towns near the capital Jakarta, with no interference from the president or the House. Anti-leftist and anti-communist rhetoric has intensified (even people calling for socialized medicine are being attacked by the hardline Islamists as 'communists'). And all the time the Western governments and the Western mass media are intensifying their praise, even suggesting that the new regimes emerging from the so-called 'Arab Spring' in the Middle East and North Africa should use Indonesia as an example.

Noor Huda Ismail, a leading expert on political Islam in Indonesia, has a compelling suggestion: 'Instead of listening to empty praise, it would be much better for the Indonesian government to accept that we have serious problems here and finally deal with them!'

According to the census conducted in 2000, Indonesia is a 100 per cent religious nation. It consists of 86.1 per cent Muslims (making it the country with the largest Muslim population in the world), 5.7 per cent Protestants, 3 per cent Roman Catholics, 1.8 per cent Hindus, and 3.4 per cent adherents of other or unspecified religions, a category that has recently also been taken to include Confucianism. Atheism is effectively banned, and one of the 'official' or permitted religions has to be marked on the identity card of every citizen.

Several Muslim organizations fought against the post-Independence secular ideals of the first Indonesian president, Ahmed Sukarno (himself a moderate Muslim). The ideological confrontation led to an armed conflict between the young state and the Islamist movement.[6] Later, after the September 30, 1965 military coup, the largest Muslim organization in the world – Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) – joined Suharto's clique and the military in conducting massacres of communists, unionists, teachers, artists, intellectuals, atheists,

members of mass movements and members of the Chinese minority. As a result, probably between 1 and 3 million people lost their lives in an orgy of terror that lasted for several months and forever changed the fabric of Indonesian society and the direction of its development.

The military coup was partially orchestrated and fully supported by the United States and other Western nations. By destroying the democratic Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI), which had been the third largest communist movement in the world after those of China and Soviet Union, the West was sending the message to Asian nations that it would be willing to go all the way to deter the so-called 'domino effect', which might result from its failure to stop the victory of the communist movements in Indochina.

The price the Indonesian people had to pay was dreadful. One of the most complex and diverse cultures in the world was ravished. Film studios were closed down, and traditional forms of theatre like *ketoprak* almost disappeared from the villages. Intellectuals were banished to prisons and camps, books were burned, and libraries 'cleansed'. Some 30 to 40 per cent of teachers were killed, and soldiers took over the classrooms. What was then forcefully injected, as a substitute, was American and Indonesian popular culture of the lowest grade. No European films made it to the cinemas, and there was no Asian art. The Chinese language was banned and so were Chinese dresses and lamps, dragons and cakes. Since then, and up to the present, serious discussions have been considered unfit for most gatherings of friends or families. The life that was encouraged became 'lite'. As slums were encircling all major cities and as misery settled in the countryside, the music was everywhere, loud and sentimental, frozen in time in the mid-1960s and 1970s. 'They tried to brainwash the entire nation,'[7] said Linda Christanty, the leading Indonesian fiction writer of Chinese ethnicity. And they succeeded.

Indonesia was first destroyed intellectually, and then stripped of its natural resources – basically, the country was robbed. By then, there was no communist opposition to stand in the way of plunder. The ruling military clique did it, assisted by servile political and economic 'elites'. The West, including Australia, allowed its companies to bite into enormous and untapped natural resources, disregarding both environmental concerns and the well-known fact that the money that stayed in Indonesia – profits from oil, timber and other raw materials – mostly disappeared into the pockets of corrupt military, government and business cronies. Indonesia is often flattered in the West as the biggest economy of Southeast Asia. Of

course, with between 237 to 300 million citizens, it has an economy much bigger than that of Malaysia with its 28 million people. On a per capita basis, however, it lags far behind Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand.

Religious organizations, hardened from settling their scores with communists who were (before 1965) insisting on land reforms (just as several Islamic groups and leaders doubled as *latifundistas*), were now back in control of human souls and of great tracts of land.

In 1998, Suharto stepped down after prolonged protests, chaos and looting in the capital. Despite the commonly accepted theory (in Indonesia and in the West) that 1998 was nothing less than a true revolution, which was supposed to end more than three decades of dictatorship, I remember witnessing with nausea those wobbly attempts to depose one single man instead of launching a struggle to overthrow the entire military/extreme capitalist/religious regime. In 1998, I left the comfort of my hotel room and moved to the campus of Trisakti University, which was in those days at the forefront of the 'revolution'. Like the students, I slept on or under the tables. There, the leaders of the uprising told me that they were tired and wanted to go home. As I recall, almost all of them agreed on one basic point: 'We love our parents and we love our teachers. This is not like 1968, this is not our Sorbonne or Mexico City. We don't want to change the system; we just want Suharto to step down.'

While students were battling the police, the looters were pulling out refrigerators and television sets from ransacked stores and malls. Chinese women were dragged in broad daylight from taxicabs and cars and publicly raped. I had to fully agree that the scenes from 1998 Jakarta did not have much in common with those from Paris or Mexico City in 1968.

The results were not particularly impressive either. Suharto stepped down on May 21, 1998, but the country continued to move in the same direction as if hypnotized. And it is still on the same track now. The only true attempt to revolutionize the nation came with the short reign of the progressive Muslim cleric Abdurrahman Wahid (in Indonesia known under his nickname 'Gus-Dur'). This sickly, half-blind but brilliant Indonesian intellectual (and arguably a closet socialist) often shared with me, in private and on camera, the most mutinous ideas, such as that 'capitalism has to be modified' and 'religion should stay in the mosque and not intervene with politics'. He meant well and he was brave, but he did not survive long. The establishment closed ranks and destroyed him within two years. He was impeached and forced to step down. Later, he was

blatantly prevented from running in the presidential elections by the Electoral Commission (a government body) on medical grounds. This was an unmistakable show of force, and a reminder that the old guard of Suharto's regime with its cronies and military was still in charge in Indonesia.

After Gus Dur, Indonesian capitalist fundamentalism hybridized with traditional Javanese feudalism continued its reign unrestrained and unchallenged. The press was 'allowed' to criticize concrete issues, but as was explained to me by the deputy chief editor of one of the major publications, certain key issues remained off-limits: the military, independence movements, religion, as well as investigative reporting on concrete corruption cases, unless there was a green light from 'above'. Overall, the Indonesian press did not, and does not, pose any challenge to the establishment, as it is mostly owned by the regime.

By 2011, only 65 per cent of Indonesians had access to electricity. A lower percentage of people had access to clean water in the major cities of Indonesia than in the cities of India and Bangladesh. Logged-out parts of the archipelago suffer from flash floods, which kill thousands of people. Social inequality has reached epic proportions: a standard sight in Indonesia is homeless children suffering from malnutrition, playing in open sewage right in front of luxury malls with brand names and marble floors, and luxury cars negotiating potholes near slums. It often appears that there is no compassion left in Indonesia, and no social justice.

These are just random elements of the horrors that began flashing in front of the eyes of the Indonesian people. The following chapters address all those demons and many of their relatives in detail.

This book was written in 2011, in an era when there still seems to be no political will to change things, no ability to plan and pave the way forward, no movement towards a better future. In 1965–66, Indonesia lost its intellectuals, and with them its ability to think, to dream and to create. Now it is falling behind on all fronts, as communist China and Vietnam are moving forward at breakneck speed. The gap between Indonesia and some other regional powers like Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand appears to be so wide that it will be impossible to bridge in the foreseeable future.

For many years, it seemed to me that the rulers of Indonesia were hiding the truth about their country's past, its economic and social performance, and its position in the world and in the region. They did this for decades. Instead of building a solid infrastructure –

hospitals, schools, a scientific base and libraries – there were erecting hollow structures – malls and empty five-star hotels. These glimpses of luxury were supposed to prove that Indonesia was 'developing', that it was a 'normal country'. Next to those structures were clogged, polluted canals, burning garbage dumps (the country has no modern waste treatment facilities), and children suffering from malnutrition. I have travelled and worked in more than 140 countries on all continents, but nowhere, not even in sub-Saharan Africa, have I witnessed such shocking, merciless contrasts. In Indonesia you see rent-a-child babies dying at the age of two – being exposed to exhaust fumes by professional beggars, in front of indifferent police and motorists. Tiny monkeys 'dance' in the traffic with their faces covered by monstrous masks, their masters pulling strings to get a few bills. Deformed people beg at intersections, some with no faces. Meanwhile inside branded cafes a few metres away, you can catch endless flashes of the affluent communicating on their BlackBerrys:

'How are you doing?'
'I'm fine. And you?'
'Good.'
'That's good. And how is Ady?'
'Oh, I think he's OK.'

And the rulers kept lying. They lied even about such essential issues as the number of people inhabiting the archipelago and the number of people living in poverty. If comparisons were not favourable to Indonesia – and honest comparisons usually were not – the rulers created their own definitions designed to boost nationalist pride, to confuse critics and postpone solutions to the countless and urgent problems.

If a definition of a 'failed state' is a state that cannot provide basic services to its population, then Indonesia has evolved into such a state. One drive across Java or Sumatra would be enough for any objective analyst or observer to conclude that Indonesia has fallen to the level of many sub-Saharan African nations, moving far away even from the norms of the region in which it is located. Ruined roads, misery, terrible medical care, a high rate of functional illiteracy, polluted rivers, unbridled logging, and garbage piling up along the roads and in the cities and towns: all these are unmistakable signs of the failure of the brutal market fundamentalism that was implemented by the elites and by the neocolonial world order.

Not everything is lost, but if it is to join the regional race or

probably even to survive, Indonesia will have to change dramatically. It would need a true revolution to depose the entire corrupt ruling class – military, civilian and religious. The government would have to put an immediate emphasis on education, social issues and health. Money that now disappears in corruption would have to be invested in science, arts and education. State educational television channels and publishing houses would have to be set up as soon as possible – and to be oriented to defending the interests of the people. Public spaces, sidewalks and parks as well as public transportation would have to be reintroduced so that the people would be allowed to gather, share knowledge and exchange ideas. There would also need to be international exchanges, particularly for the young.

The new system would have to make it easy for political parties representing the interests of the people to register and compete. New trade unions should be allowed to represent workers, not the owners of companies, as is the case now.

Much has to be done. But before anything, the creeping fear that encompasses the psyche of entire nation needs to disappear.

Even before any significant change can be implemented, before any revolution can take place, there has to be discussion. It must be brutally open and frank, and that would often be uncomfortable, maybe even scary for many. But it is unavoidable. Nothing could be worse than the present state of self-deception. If illness comes, it has to be diagnosed and fought. Indonesia is ill, mentally and physically, after the orgy of terror in the 1960s when the military committed treason by siding with foreign interests instead of doing what it is formally obliged to do – to defend its own men, women and children. Indonesia is ill after the mass murder it committed in East Timor, Aceh and Papua; and after living through an inhuman political and social system imposed by foreign interests, a system which has been and is plundering the people's minds and bodies. It is sick after abandoning its own cultures, in exchange receiving junk food, junk entertainment and junk ways of thinking and feeling. This book attempts to analyse, to produce a diagnosis; but it cannot cure. The Indonesian people – the rightful owners of their sprawling archipelago – are the only ones who could implement the necessary treatment and then embark on the process of healing.

2

FROM COLONY TO DICTATORSHIP

> 'To protest in the name of morality against 'excesses' or 'abuses' is an error which hints at active complicity. There are no 'abuses' or 'excesses' here, simply an all-pervasive system.
>
> Simone de Beauvoir[1]

COLONIALISM

Before colonial times, the archipelago now hosting Indonesia never managed to unite. Or, more precisely, it never strived for unity. It consisted of many different cultures and kingdoms that spoke distinct languages and worshipped different gods. The history of this part of the world was always marked by violence, bloodletting and murderous intrigues, although the violence here never came close to the level experienced in Europe. Kingdoms and sultanates were at each other's throats most of the time. But disputes were settled in a local way, wars fought and peace made, based on traditions and a regional understanding of life.

On many occasions Western powers, particularly the Dutch, took advantage of the disunity of this part of the world and imposed themselves with vigour, spite and selfishness. Eventually, this astonishing and complex mosaic of civilizations came under the total control of the emerging capitalist states of Europe. Western colonial expansion basically enslaved the people of today's Indonesia, and as in other parts of the world, it interrupted their natural path of development.

In the 'Introduction' to *Exile*, my book with Pramoedya Ananta Toer, Professor Nagesh Rao wrote:

> For centuries before the development of capitalism in Europe, India, China and the Southeast Asia archipelago that we know today as Indonesia had been flourishing centres of trade, commerce and culture. With trade routes cutting across the whole Asia and Europe, and reaching even to the west coast of Africa, India and China were, by the time of the European Middle Ages,

> far ahead of Western Europe in commercial and technological development.

But the greed of European empires and nations had no boundaries, and where they failed in science and culture they compensated in brutality and determination. Conquering, looting and controlling were put above all other values and achievements, thus the barbaric era of exploitation arrived in Asia. The force and cruelty, with which Europeans began to rule, left the Southeast Asians (as it earlier left the native Central and South Americans) in panic and in fright. The shock factor, the brutality, left people immobilized and defenseless.[2]

Europeans fought each other over the control of lucrative ports, trade routes and rich islands. The British and the French, the Portuguese and the Dutch: they all came for their share of the continent – from India to Southeast Asia. Those European nations that did not fight with their ships and soldiers were often operating behind the scenes, financing expeditions or, to use modern terminology, 'investing' in them. The local people were turned into nothing more than production tools to fill the coffers of the monarchies and the church in a faraway continent. Their lives were worth nothing. Women – whether from the royalty or from the villages – were hardly more than booty for the conquerors. The men and children were seen as disposable slaves.

As Nagesh Rao points out:

> Dutch rule over the East Indies was characterized by the most repugnant racism. In the coming years, as virtually the entire population of Sumatra, Java, Borneo was forced into plantation-based slave labor, the democratic ideals of the bourgeois revolutions of France and Holland were not considered applicable to the people of Dutch East Indies …. Jan Pieterszoon Coen, one of the founders of Dutch colonialism, put it plainly: 'May not a man in Europe do what he likes with his cattle?'[3]

INDEPENDENCE

'It was in the late 19th century when the myth of Indonesian nationalism was born', explained Hilmar Farid over mugs of strong black coffee placed strategically in the midst of several historical books depicting the enthusiastic and upbeat era of President Sukarno:

> There were actually different visions on how to form the nation – that of intellectuals and that of the simple people or what is called 'the grassroots'. These visions were competing. And I say that right now the Indonesian state is in the hands of the elites. While I believe what we need is something else – something that could be described as popular nationalism based on freedom, democracy and social justice. That's the type of nationalism that I could support.[4]

The Institute of Social History of Indonesia (ISSI) is nothing more than a small private house rented by several intellectuals, but it is fast becoming indispensable as the institution from where the 'true Indonesian history' is being presented to the world. Farid, a progressive scholar, is now revered as the leading historian of the objective narrative in Indonesia. The Institute is located in the modest (even by local standards) neighbourhood of Batu Ampar in East Jakarta, and also functions as a library, with more than 4,200 volumes.

'In 2003, several intellectuals decided to put their private book collections together and create this institution,' explained the coordinator of the library, Muhammad Fauzi. 'This group included historians, a psychologist, a lawyer and even one computer expert. The purpose was to do more research on the social history of Indonesia.'

The Institute also began publishing. Its first title was *The Year That Never Ended: Understanding the Experiences of the Victims of 65*, a collection of essays on the events of 1965 by various Indonesian writers, edited by leading progressive Indonesian scholars John Roosa (an assistant professor at the University of British Columbia) and Hilmar Farid.

ISSI in Jakarta and PUSDEP (the Centre for History and Political Ethics) in Yogyakarta gradually became two institutions for an alternative (non-propagandistic) interpretation of Indonesian history. In these two places, nothing seems to be taboo and people are encouraged to discuss the complexity of the archipelago's turbulent past, from the early days to the present.

ISSI is where I came to discuss the late 19th century and the 20th century, a period that was marked by colonial exploitation and to some extent industrialization. It was also the era when several important movements were emerging: social movements and the unions were founded, and so were the pan-Islamic and communist movements. There was an intriguing intertwining between the Islamic and communist movements and the rebellions in Sumatra

and Java. The national awakening was expressed in 1928 in the *Sumpah Pemuda* ('Youth Pledge'), which defined for the first time a plan for a single Indonesian homeland – one people, one language, one nation.

Then the Japanese arrived and their presence temporarily released the internal tension among the nationalists. Many Indonesians welcomed the Imperial Army as liberators, although for many the enthusiasm was short lived.

One important, but not often addressed, fact from that period is that during the Japanese occupation of Indonesia, the future dictator Suharto served in several Indonesian security forces organized by the Imperial Army. A few years earlier, in the 1940s, Suharto had joined the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army, so this history amply illustrates his predisposition and readiness to serve foreign masters.

Almost immediately after the departure of the Dutch, the Javanese peasants began occupation of the large plantations – acts that the Japanese Imperial Army did not particularly support, but allowed to happen.

The Japanese mobilized the people; they gave some military training to common men. While the Japanese empire imposed *romusha* (forced labour) during the Second World War, it also gave a huge boost to Indonesian identity through promoting its language, Bahasa Indonesia. Literature began to flourish. Pramoedya Ananta Toer, who worked as a typist for a Japanese newspaper in Jakarta, began writing his first works of fiction. The names of streets and towns were changed. During the Japanese occupation, there was even a prison for former European colonizers, and at one point, the former Dutch governor-general was paraded symbolically in front of the crowd. Almost all Indonesian nationalist leaders were freed and encouraged to cooperate with the Japanese, which, it has to be said, almost all of them did.

'There was a gap between the time when Japan lost the Second World War in early August 1945 and the new arrival of the Dutch, who returned with the British troops in September 1945. In this time gap, the nationalist leaders moved fast, announcing the independence, forming the republic – all with the help of the Japanese', said Hilmar Farid.

Indonesia declared independence on August 17, 1945, two days after the surrender of Japan. *Merdeka!* (freedom). But the Europeans returned and a bloodbath came shortly afterwards.

After Japan surrendered, the Allied Forces wanted to give back

> the power over the archipelago to the Netherlands and, of course, Indonesia refused to accept such an arrangement. Conflict became inevitable. It started in Jakarta, spreading to several other areas, and finally culminated in Surabaya. The British troops bombarded the city with a barrage of heavy artillery. They were bombing Surabaya from the sea and from the air. Thousands of people died, including children.[5]

Eventually, in December 1949, the Dutch formally recognized Indonesian independence, but only after substantial pressure from the international community, including the United States, which halted the transfer of Marshall Plan funds to the Netherlands,[6] and the UN Security Council, which ordered the Dutch to withdraw their troops and negotiate an agreement. But what did the declaration of independence mean to this sprawling archipelago, where the only unifying factor was that the Dutch had colonized it for generations?

'My thesis is that Indonesia is what could be described as a Political Project, which is not even finished yet,' argued Farid. He added:

> The Proclamation of Independence took place in Jakarta and those who did it were mostly 'elite nationalists' – 200 of them. Most of the people of this archipelago didn't even know for months that the independence had been proclaimed. Forget about places like Aceh, even in Jakarta most of the people did not know. The point is that people were not consulted, leave alone organizing what you would call a referendum. In 1945, there was this tremendous energy and the leaders could have consulted the people, but they simply decided not to.[7]

It is no secret that in many parts of Indonesia, people would probably have opted not to join the 'Indonesian project' if they had been allowed to vote. In many places, the decision was made by the local elites, mostly by those with strong links to Jakarta.

THE SUKARNO ERA

Farid summarized:

> What followed was Sukarno's dictatorship. He introduced the so-called 'Guided Democracy' and yes, it was definitely a

> dictatorial regime, but directed to provide welfare to the people. Sukarno also allowed more citizens to participate in the decision making, in governance and social affairs. All this was destroyed after 1965.[8]

Young Suharto also played a role right from the beginning, although that role was, as could be suspected, one that led to corruption. Pramoedya Ananta Toer recalled: 'When Sukarno put Suharto in charge of an antismuggling unit, Suharto himself became involved in smuggling goods from Indonesia to Singapore. This fact is documented in a letter from Subandrio to Sukarno.'[9]

Not everything went smoothly during the Sukarno era, but his government was marked by 'nation and character-building' zeal, enormous enthusiasm, and a striving for social justice and secular patriotism. Indonesia was building a wide and modern path called the Third Way, together with India, Yugoslavia and other similarly minded nations. It was supposed to be a path independent from the two superpowers, which were locked in the Cold War. No serious reform could have been possible without the support of the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) and its mass organizations, and the party behaved in a highly disciplined and democratic manner.

The young country was also built on the principles of *Pancasila*, the official philosophical foundation of the Indonesian state. It comprises five principles held to be inseparable and interrelated:

- belief in the one and only God, (in Indonesian, *Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa*)
- just and civilized humanity (in Indonesian, *Kemanusiaan Yang Adil dan Beradab*)
- the unity of Indonesia (in Indonesian, *Persatuan Indonesia*)
- democracy guided by inner wisdom in the unanimity arising out of deliberations amongst representatives (in Indonesian, *Kerakyatan Yang Dipimpin oleh Hikmat Kebijaksanaan, Dalam Permusyawaratan dan Perwakilan*)
- social justice for all the people of Indonesia (in Indonesian, *Keadilan Sosial bagi seluruh Rakyat Indonesia*).

Didiek Poernomo, an author of several books on *Pancasila*, explained to me that 'In my opinion, *Pancasila* is not only an ideology, but it is a philosophy on how humanity on a small or large scale should live in harmony between itself and the environment.'[10]

The political direction of Indonesia, as one of the leaders of the

Third World, proved strongly irritating to both the United States and the United Kingdom and their geopolitical interests. Nationalists with left-leaning ideologies – that means, in essence, leaders who put the welfare of their people above the business interests of multinational companies – are usually punished by the most violent means. Indonesia was no exception. It was soon to experience the wrath of its former and present colonial masters, and forced to live through some of the most violent days and weeks in modern human history.

In the 1950s and early 1960s, though, life appeared to be relatively gentle and uncomplicated. Of course, there were some serious problems, including an attempt by Islamists to steer the nation from its secular path, but overall, Indonesia was slowly but steadily evolving into a socialist and independent country. It was poor, probably very poor, but the people were proud and enthusiastic. After all, they were building a new, enormous and independent nation. I spoke to many men and women who are now in their sixties and seventies. They all seemed to agree on several basic points about pre-1965 Indonesia.

Jane Luyke Oei, one of the individuals who appeared in the book *Mereka Bilang Aku China* (They Say I Am Chinese),[11] recalled in conversation with me that those few years before the coup were very different from what became of Indonesia in the later decades:

> In the early 1960s, I was already married. Mado, my daughter, is now 56 years old. We were all poor before 1965 but we never complained much. Now people are so unhappy …. In those days, I never heard of anybody wanting to commit suicide. Even then there was crime, of course, but definitely not like now.
>
> And we had hope then. So much of it!
>
> My husband was a member of parliament but he was very decent person. He didn't abuse his power at the House. He had nothing of the shameful behavior of present-day DPR members – people who just care about their own interests and wealth.
>
> In those days, we were happy to go around the city by a bus or truck or by tram. Nobody would even think about asking 'What kind of car do you drive?'
>
> Friendships were sincere and usually they lasted an entire lifetime.[12]

Mr Tumiso, a former teacher and later a political prisoner (he was in Buru concentration camp between 1970 and 1979), recalled the same, gentler and focused, humane Indonesia:

> Before 1965, we were all poor. Indonesia was battered by foreign powers that wanted to grab our wealth.
>
> But we had an egalitarian spirit at that time. A cabinet minister and *becak* [rickshaw] driver could have been seen eating at the same place; they would eat at the same *warung*,[13] wear the same clothes. We had courage and we had a country to build; we had no time to waste on material things.
>
> In 1963, President Sukarno introduced the New Life Movement. We had to eat corn and yams at that time, but we were fine with it. Social status did not matter much then. We were building the country! It is so different now.[14]

It is worth looking at what preceded the coup, and the main reasons for it. The United States was losing the war in Indochina, and communist and progressive movements were gaining strength all over the Asian continent. Sukarno was inspiring many in the region with his fierce anti-Western speeches. And he was not only speaking, he was acting. He forced both the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to leave the country, after accusing them of conspiring with multinationals.

Who could forget his comment, 'To hell with your aid!' thrown at the face of the US ambassador at a mass rally in Jakarta? This was his way of saying 'no' to a massive loan offered by the World Bank, backed by US lobbying. It would have forced Indonesia to implement severe austerity measures and to denationalize the previously foreign-owned sector of the economy. Sukarno was extremely suspicious of the IMF and the World Bank. He was aware – and he showed to the world and to his people that he knew – that such loans were often offered to poor countries at high interest rates, mostly for public infrastructure, with the full knowledge that the country could never afford to pay back even the interest. When countries defaulted on their debt, they were required to privatize their oil industry, mines and forests. The only beneficiaries were foreign multinationals and local corrupt officials. And naturally, the victims were the poor majority of the nation.

Sukarno organized the Asia-Africa Conference, also known as the Bandung Conference (April 18–24, 1955) in the West Javanese city of Bandung. During that conference, which took place in a splendid art deco building, the idea of the Non-Aligned Movement was conceived. Delegates from 29 countries rejected all forms of colonialism and neocolonialism, promoting their vision for self-determination. The French policy in North Africa came under the

strongest attack, but the United States and other European powers were also criticized. Chou Enlai, the Chinese prime minister, was present, and so were the Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt.

Mrs Lestari, former Gerwani[15] organizer, recalled in the documentary film *The Women and the Generals*, 'The cruelty of colonialism, that was what we wanted to emphasize and make people understand and to direct the passion of the people to love the independence of our country.'

The narration of the film speaks about direct attacks against Indonesia:

> According to a declassified document in 1953, the American President Eisenhower and his secretary of state John Foster Dulles decided that Sukarno's power had to shrink and be confined to the island of Java in order to protect American oil interests on Sumatra and economic interests on the other islands. In 1957, the CIA started one of its major covert actions. The CIA began air dropping weapons, equipment and instructors for an army of 9000 men on Sumatra, and they also dropped weapons on the other islands to the military commanders who wanted to confront Sukarno. CIA planes even bombed civilians, pretending they were Sukarno's aircraft. But, in May 1958, the covert actions came to an abrupt end. The CIA pilot Allen Pope[16] was shot down and kept alive and convicted in an Indonesian court. The USA now turned to the Indonesian General Nasution, who had suppressed the communist rebellion in Java in 1948. Nasution immediately began sending officers to the USA for further education. During the first years of the 1960s, the situation went from bad to worse. Sukarno was getting no loans from the World Bank and no spare parts from abroad for his nationalized companies. There was hyperinflation and there was hunger.[17]

Pramoedya Ananta Toer, as well as most other progressive intellectuals in Indonesia, stood firmly by Sukarno:

> I always respected him. I agreed with his views, especially when it came to his ideas about national character building. They were extraordinarily visionary, but, after the 1965 coup, nobody wanted to talk about them any more. He had profound insight into Indonesia. He knew about the history of his country. During his era, Indonesia was regarded as an enemy of many Western

> countries, because Indonesia stood against colonialism, against imperialism, and against capitalism. That's why I was, and still am, absolutely supportive of him.
>
> Yes, under Sukarno there was hope, but then everything was destroyed by the coup that brought Suharto to power, and Sukarno's supporters were eliminated. Before that, there was hope: Sukarno was truly loved by the majority of Indonesians.
>
> Indonesia was respected by other nations. It was like a lighthouse of hope for other developing nations in Asia and Africa. Sukarno was a great orator who never hesitated to talk to the masses through radio and television. Practically everybody in this country knew about the concepts he was advocating.[18]

However it was exactly his popularity that made Sukarno so dangerous to Western neocolonial designs. It was not in the interests of Washington, London or Canberra for developing countries to form an international coalition that would intervene with the geopolitical designs of Western nations. In addition, Sukarno nationalized some key industries and forged close relations with the PKI. With around 3 million members and a support base about 27 million strong, it was the third largest communist party in the world, after China and Soviet Union.

And the PKI was going to go even further in reforming the postcolonial Indonesian system. It was determined to convince Sukarno to fight for social justice – to push for and to implement land reforms. In this essentially feudal country, most Indonesian peasants in the 1950s and 1960s lived like serfs (as they still do now), and the land belonged to big landowners, many of them members of religious organizations, particularly from NU (Nahdlatul Ulama), a traditionalist Sunni Islamic group that is, by some accounts, the largest Muslim organization in the world. Driven by business as well as religious and ideological interests (all motivated to discredit the communists' insistence on social change), PKI members were demonized as 'atheists', therefore enemies of Islam, despite the fact that some PKI members were actually practising Muslims. The NU, the right wing of the Indonesian military, and the US political and economic elites joined forces in plotting and executing the most brutal massacre in the modern history.

Asvi Warman Adam told me, 'It is important to remember that before 1965 there were three political powers in Indonesia: Sukarno, the army and PKI, the Communist Party of Indonesia. As 1 October

1965 was approaching, the political centre of gravity was shifting towards PKI, instead of the army.'[19]

It was highly likely that in the next elections, PKI would have come to power democratically. 'At that time, PKI was a legal and very strong party,' I was told by Ilham Aidit, son of a murdered leader of PKI. 'They didn't need to stage a coup, because all they needed was to wait for elections in order to get seats.'[20]

Historian Hilmar Farid confirmed his words: 'In the upcoming 1966 elections, the Communist Party would have won.'[21]

The United States began a destabilization campaign, bombing several parts of the country in covert operations. Military officers were invited for training and indoctrination campaigns. So were economists. Since 1956 the Ford Foundation had been funding scholarships for many Indonesian economists at the University of California at Berkeley. These graduates were later nicknamed the 'Berkeley Mafia' (similar to 'Los Chicago Boys' in Chile).[22] After their return to Indonesia, they began building a pro-Western and pro-market Faculty of Economics at the University of Indonesia. Economists with market-fundamentalist leanings were preparing for the day when Sukarno would be sidelined, deposed or killed, markets would be opened up, and resources and factories privatized.

While the majority of Indonesian men and women were busy 'building the nation and character', often sacrificing themselves for their country, the coup, the slaughter, the genocide of 1965 and the consequent market-fundamentalist earthquake had been thoroughly planned and designed for years, both on distant shores and behind closed doors in Jakarta itself.

ELITES IN INDONESIAN HISTORY

From any moral angle, the way Western colonies were run in Asia and elsewhere was thoroughly perverse. And on this perversion, a new class thrived. Like scavenger birds on garbage dumps, Indonesian elites were formed during the colonial era, over centuries and generations. General Suharto himself and his cronies were subordinates to the European colonialists; go-betweens between the foreign imperialists and the impoverished native population, in many instances functioning as jailers and prison guards. Practically speaking they had an important role in governance, controlling and oppressing the population on a daily basis. They strictly followed their own financial interests, enriching themselves through

Photo 2.1 Another propaganda piece from Lubang Buaya: a monument to several top army officers (including six generals) who died on the night of September 30/October 1, 1965. The generals were killed by the military, but Suharto's propaganda blamed the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI), and this served as justification for the mass killings in 1965/66.

corruption, and consistently disregarding the wider interests of their nation.

In other countries that were striving for independence, including Vietnam and China, revolutions that were fought over decades managed to weaken the legacy and influence of the corrupt local elites. Servility to foreign masters was exposed and deplored; traitors lost their position in society, and many even lost their heads. But Indonesia did not go through the cleansing process of a revolution, and Sukarno's era was too short to uproot the entire caste of collaborators. Independence was largely delivered by the defeated Japanese army (which was for years trying to eradicate all Western influences from the archipelago), and the heroic but short struggles of patriots, like that against the British invaders in Surabaya, were not enough to change the structure of society.

The struggle for independence was relatively brief: as mentioned before, Sukarno declared *Merdeka* on August 17, 1945 and the Dutch were finally forced to withdraw in 1948. But the Indonesian

elites survived and bided their time till they could return to power. As their fathers and grandfathers had done for centuries, serving the Dutch colonial regime, the elites once again offered their country and its people to foreign masters in the mid-1960s, in exchange for power and questionable prestige.

THE COUP OF 1965

The planners of the 1965 coup – the US government, Indonesian military and religious cadres, and right-wing economists – were not preparing an insignificant local event. They were aiming at grand fireworks, a real orgy of terror that would put into motion long sequences of monstrous coups, dictatorships and plunder. The Indonesian coup was arguably the first of the neocolonial era, but it was to be replicated all over the world. The shock, the horror and the destruction of a progressive, secular and socialist state – all these were to be seen again in Chile and Argentina, Central America, Bolivia, South Africa, Rwanda, Congo/DRC and even Russia.

'Jakarta is coming', the right-wingers used to spit at Allende's supporters in Chile before September 11, 1973. 'Jakarta' was thus a threat, a warning, and an inevitable and frightening outcome for any nation that dared to develop on its own terms, and to put its own people first.

The coup took place on September 30 and October 1, 1965. On that night seven high-ranking officers (including six generals) were kidnapped and murdered at Lubang Buaya on the outskirts of East Jakarta, by a group from within the military that came to be known as the 30th September Movement. Although this act had nothing to do with the PKI, and the evidence is clear that it was planned and carried out by this military faction, it was presented as an attempted coup, and an excuse for the use of military force. A substantial force was immediately mobilized, General Suharto took command of it, and the capital city fell under his control just few hours after the 'attempted coup', which served as excuse and justification for the real, massive coup.

Benedict Anderson described the coup like this:

> The crisis finally exploded on the morning of October 1, 1965, when a small group of mostly middle-ranking army officers kidnapped and later killed six senior generals on the grounds that they were planning Sukarno's overthrow. Most of these disaffected officers had long personal associations with Suharto,

> and it is virtually certain that they informed him of their plans. They made no attempt to seize him, though he had operational command of all seasoned military units in the capital. Nor did Suharto make the slightest effort to warn Yani and his comrades of what was afoot. Instead he crushed the conspirators with ease and proclaimed that they were tools of the Communist Party.
>
> Almost all the military officers involved in what was then called 'the coup' – though the actors themselves claimed that they were protecting Sukarno from a military coup steered by the CIA – were executed, via death sentences in kangaroo courts, or outside any legality. Only one (barely) survived the dictatorship.[23]

Mass media outlets were closed down (except for two dailies used by the leaders of the coup, *Angkatan Bersenjata* and *Berita Yudha*), and the propaganda machine went to work as the tanks and armoured vehicles were rolling down the streets of the capital. In a poor and mostly disorganized nation, a chain of events unveiling with such clockwork precision could hardly have been spontaneous. The only correct information given by the regime about the coup was its date. It was claimed that the killers of the generals were communists (seen in the US mode, as thugs without religion or decency). Stories were spread that the women from the women's mass organization Gerwani had castrated the generals. Then heroic General Suharto, after few moments of initial hesitation and soul-searching, benevolently intervened and saved the country from the red menace.

'It is actually very clear who killed the generals: it was done by the troops – by the kidnappers – that consisted of the presidential guards Tjakrabirawa, aided by squads from Brigif-1, Yon 454 and Yon 530,' Hilmar Farid explained:

> The army later twisted this historical fact and said that the killers were from the Communist Party. The truth is that there had been no civilians among the troops that kidnapped and killed the generals. It is correct that some of the party members and members of mass organizations affiliated with the party were at that time in the area, but it would be totally wrong to think that it was a party operation.[24]

GENOCIDE

Forty years after the genocide, Pramoedya Ananta Toer could not speak about the horrors without his voice quivering and his eyes

watering. He had never forgiven the killers. How could he? His comrades were murdered and his books were publicly burned and then banned. 'The Brantas River was full of bodies and was red because of the blood. I didn't witness the rivers full of blood, because I was already in prison by that time.' Then his voice broke and he paused, fighting tears: 'I cannot talk about it. I don't understand how people can kill other people like that.'[25]

The events of 1965–66 will never be fully understood. The state, the military, religious leaders and the media did everything in their power to keep the people terrified and in shock for decades, while erasing concrete evidence of the crimes against humanity. Lies were spread and repeated, and inserted into textbooks, media reports and films.

The genocide that took the lives of probably between 1 and 3 million people was so horrendous that the nation is still subconsciously in shock, paralysed and unable to come to terms with its own crimes. Almost every family in Indonesia has murderers and victims in its ranks. Open discussion on the topic is simply unthinkable. The military was involved but the massacres were often delegated to religious – Muslim – cadres and students. Millions of ordinary Indonesians were involved, either as killers, rapists and thieves, or as silent bystanders unwilling to risk their lives to defend the innocent. Many more millions denounced their neighbours, and snitched on their friends, and even family members.

A gravedigger on a southeastern beach in Bali (he didn't want his name to be used) gave this testimony in the film that I wrote and produced, *Terlena – Breaking of a Nation* (2004):

> The first one was handcuffed, his hands were tied, this was called 'quota'. He was brought here to the truck, and then they shot him, slaughtered him with machetes. He died here. I had to bury him. I buried him here and then I went home. Sometimes, there were ten, fifteen, three, or five of them. Everyday they came. Tied, shot, they died and were buried here. Again died and buried. They called it 'quota'.

According to Grace Leksana, psychologist and professor at Atmajaya University, 'The nation has been suffering from psychological trauma. The first ten years after the coup have been about creating the fear, as powerful as possible. Fear even within the smallest cluster of society, like family.'[26]

Just to give an example of the atrocities of 1965, according to eyewitnesses, tens of thousands were brutally executed in the

Boyolali Regency in Central Java. The prisoners were made to sit in an open field, a few hundred each day, with both hands tied behind their backs, their faces and bodies covered in bleeding wounds. The blood was drying under the scorching sun. They sat there in silence, waiting for nightfall when the Special Armed Forces would begin the slow and systematic slaughter. Some prisoners were brutally tortured before being killed; others had to dig their own graves. Prisoners knew that they were waiting for their turn to be killed, but they probably did not realize how cruel their end would be. The shovels used to dig graves were utilized for hacking the back of the necks of the victims who were kneeling at the edge of the holes. Some were still twisting and moaning as the fresh earth was shovelled in to bury them alive. No bullet was to be wasted – bullets were for those few who fought back or tried to escape. Every night, the methodical slaughter continued with terrible predictability. It went on for weeks – not only in Boyolali, but also all over Java and Bali, everywhere.

It is never admitted, but it appears that the entire nation is now waiting for the victims who survived the onslaught to die: to disappear, taking their testimonies to the grave. And, one by one, these people are indeed passing away, including Pramoedya Ananta Toer, who could be described as the conscience of the nation. Because his books were banned for decades he is virtually unknown to the younger generations. Before he passed away, he said in his last book (*Exile*, which we worked on with him):

> Of course, the main goal of the West was to depose Sukarno because of his three principles: anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism. There was friction in the military, which was divided into supporters of Sukarno and supporters of Suharto, whose goal was to grab power. It was a coup. Suharto's supporters used one faction in the military to kill six generals and one army officer – an act that later triggered mass slaughter. The victims were communists, Chinese, and all supporters of Sukarno. So this is what happened: the military and Suharto staged the coup and then accused others of staging it, eventually killing two million people. Do you understand? They killed two million people as 'revenge' for something they had done themselves!
>
> There is a parallel in our Javanese past – the history of Kebo Ijo, who was ordered by Ken Arok to kill Tunggul Ametung. After Tunggul Ametung was murdered, Ken Arok came to power and ordered Kebo Ijo to be executed. So, as you can see, there is a pattern in our history.[27]

Several years ago I was told by the leading Indonesian historian, Sorbonne-educated Asvi Warman Adam:

> About the role of the United States: There was a document stating that the United States produced a list of leading party members of the PKI. Based on this data the army did the killings. Of course the army had its own list, but I believe that the data given by the United States Embassy was more complete. So in my opinion, in the cold war climate, the US had its own interests in destroying the Communists. It can be seen in the archives, whether these are American or Australian archives, that the US was supporting the destruction of the Communists in Indonesia.[28]

Naomi Klein summarized the coup of 1965 in *The Shock Doctrine*:

> Suharto … had shown that if massive repression was used preemptively, the country would go into a kind of shock and resistance could be wiped out before it ever took place. His use of terror was so merciless, so far beyond even the worst expectations, that a people who only weeks earlier had been collectively striving to assert their country's independence were now sufficiently terrified that they ceded total control to Suharto and his henchmen. Ralph McGehee, a senior CIA operations manager during the years of the coup, said Indonesia was a 'model operation' …. You can trace back all major, bloody events from Washington to the way Suharto came to power. The success of that meant that it would be repeated, again and again.[29]

In a well-known article from 2005, '40 years later: the mass killings in Indonesia', two Global Research scholars, John Roosa and Joseph Nevins (associate professor at Vassar College, New York), summarized the events of September 30, 1965:

> The September 30th Movement was Suharto's Reichstag fire: a pretext for destroying the communist party and seizing state power. As with the February 1933 fire in the German parliament that Hitler used to create a hysterical, crisis-filled atmosphere, the September 30th Movement was exaggerated by Suharto's clique of officers until it assumed the proportions of a wild, vicious, supernatural monster. The army whipped up an anti-communist propaganda campaign from the early days of October 1965: 'the

> PKI' had castrated and tortured the seven army officers it had abducted in Jakarta, danced naked and slit the bodies of the army officers with a hundred razor blades, drawn up hit lists, dug thousands of ditches around the country to hold countless corpses, stockpiled guns imported from China, and so on. The army banned many newspapers and put the rest under army censorship. It was precisely this work of the army's psychological warfare specialists that created the conditions in which the mass murder of 'the PKI' seemed justified.
>
> The question as to whether or not the PKI actually organised the September 30th Movement is important only because the Suharto regime made it important. Otherwise, it is irrelevant. Even if the PKI had nothing whatsoever to do with the movement, the army generals would have blamed the party for it. As it was, they made their case against the PKI largely on the basis of the transcripts of the interrogations of those movement participants who hadn't already been summarily executed. Given that the army used torture as standard operating procedure for interrogations, the statements of the suspects cannot be trusted. Hunter's CIA report, primarily based on those transcripts, is as reliable as an Inquisition text on witchcraft.
>
> The PKI as a whole was clearly not responsible for the September 30th Movement. The party's three million members did not participate in it. If they had, it would not have been such a small-scale affair.[30]

The propaganda was so powerful and successful that almost nobody in Indonesia questioned the official version.

Both local and foreign anti-communist and pro-business crusaders seemed to have had very few scruples, since one of the largest and richest (in terms of natural resources) countries in the world was up for grabs. The problem was that the military and religious cadres became so overzealous that they ended up murdering millions, instead of the thousands that might have secured the coup. And the US empire offered its unconditional help both in the planning and by providing equipment. Naomi Klein wrote:

> After several false starts, the opportunity came in October 1965, when General Suharto, backed by the CIA, began the process of seizing power and eradicating the left. The CIA had been quietly compiling the list of the country's leading leftists, a document that fell to Suharto's hands, while the Pentagon helped from without

> by supplying extra weapons and field radios so Indonesian forces could communicate in the remotest parts of the archipelago. Suharto then sent out his soldiers to hunt down the four to five thousand leftists on his 'shooting lists', as the CIA referred to them; the U.S. embassy received regular reports on their progress. As the information came in, the CIA crossed names off their lists until they were satisfied that the Indonesian left had been annihilated. One of the people involved in the operation was Robert J. Martens, who worked for the embassy in Jakarta. 'It really was a big help to the army,' he told the journalist Kathy Kadane twenty-five years later. 'They probably killed a lot of people, and I probably have a lot of blood on my hands, but that's not all bad. There's a time when you have to strike hard at a decisive moment.'[31]

Purges began almost immediately. Ilham Aidit's father Dipa Nusantara Aidit, who was secretary general of the PKI, a charismatic speaker and determined advocate of land reforms, was 'arrested' and murdered. His son spoke of it in our film *Terlena*:

> One day my dad got arrested. The team that arrested him was hesitating when he got out of the house and asked them whether they wanted to arrest a minister or the secretary general of PKI or the vice-chairman of the parliament. In fact, at that time he was going to be brought to Jakarta in order to be put on trial. In my opinion that was the initial plan. But on the way to Jakarta, which then took two or three days, came another order, which I believe was given by Suharto, to get rid of him. A colonel Yasir Hadibroto, who afterwards became governor of Lampung, performed the killing. On the second day of the journey to Jakarta my dad was brought to a place – to an elementary school – surrounded by banana fields and was executed there. I am very sure that the state at that time performed a murder, an extra-judicial execution of my father. I am sure that if my father had been tried he would have been able to tell things that could have weakened the New Order regime. He could have said that the PKI was not involved. They killed many PKI members so that the truth would not be revealed.

In 2009 I met the British anthropologist Andrew Beatty at Cambridge University, where both of us were speaking on the state of post-Suharto Indonesia. We became friends and exchanged books.

I found his *A Shadow Falls: In the heart of Java* to be much more than a brilliant anthropological book. It was a deep analysis of the post-1965 psyche of the Javanese people, a detailed account depicting the cultural and psychological as well as the moral journey of the most populous of the Indonesian islands through the last few decades. It was also an elegantly crafted narrative, almost poetry in prose. But both the messages and the images in the book were chilling:

> Fishing for background, I mentioned two or three other people I had met in east Bayu and again Pak Lurah seemed caught between warning me about them and admitting that they personally bore no blame. The 'ringleaders' were killed, he explained – executed by local death squads or arrested by the army. Those who remained were the small fry – sympathizers and camp followers. But they were not full citizens. Some were denied the vote.
>
> 'How many were killed?'
>
> 'Ah, nine or ten. Far more in other villages. In Ulih-ulihan thirty-odd. In the southern villages, hundreds. Banyuwangi: thousands. Here it was under control. Pak Arjo saw to that.'
>
> 'Who did it? Arjo's men?'
>
> 'Well, not exactly. Each village handled the cases sent to it. Our people were taken away and died elsewhere.' He held his thumbs together like a prisoner. 'You didn't see them again. That way there were no grudges.' He lowered his voice. 'A few died here, messily –.'
>
> It was not easy for Pak Lurah to talk of this, the great political taboo of his lifetime (and doubly taboo to a foreigner). But his reluctance wasn't just prudence. He was personally uncomfortable. It was as if a collective taint had fallen upon the east, like the aftermath of some terrible plague. Involvement in '1965' was a heritable stigma – in Suharto's Indonesia, the original sin. But the terror of those times had given way to shame. And this was how the headman put it: the victims and their families felt shame – at the past, at their blighted lives. So you couldn't talk of these things – these people whom you had known all your life –without feeling some of that shame, without feeling in some way, well, implicated.[32]

The victims were 'implicated'. Those who were raped and tortured, those whose loved ones had disappeared, now felt the shame. This brutal and grotesque psychological game was well planned and

implemented, and its impact can be felt even now. All moral rules were wiped out. Logic was defied. Unlike in Latin America or in some parts of Africa, where people took arms to fight dictatorships imposed on them by the West, the great majority of Indonesian people accepted the rules forced on them by the winners. The costs were ruinous: inability and unwillingness to analyse reality, followed by consequent fear of understanding the past as well as its impact on the present. Indonesia got stuck in a vicious cycle of self-deception. Black was defined as white, suffering confused with shame, and guilt with pride. The result of this intellectual and moral mayhem was converted into an inability to think, to judge and to create. There is no doubt that Indonesia's collapse is directly linked to its response to the events of 1965.

Andrew Beatty continued:

> Others were less awkward, less compassionate. I met a man in Banyuwangi who had ferried prisoners to their deaths from Kalibaru, a plantation used as a holding camp. Some were allocated for civilian execution – the village quotas – others were trucked up the mountains towards Jember. Halfway there, they were thrown alive over a cliff. 'We used to dump twenty loads a day,' said the man with a pained grin. 'Sometimes they'd douse them with petrol and drop a torch over the cliff. You could see them twitching in the ravine below.'
>
> When he heard that I was prospecting for a house in east Bayu, Pujil, with a callous laugh, said, 'You would have found a lot of empty houses in 1965. Could have taken your pick!' We were sitting in Bu Mari's kitchen – the usual mixture of neighbors and callers, men whom Wan called Pak Arjo's 'followers'. One of them, a quiet, mournful man of about fifty, was a member of the village staff, an irrigation official. Pujil pointed to him and said, half in jest: 'He killed quite a few himself! Ask him about it. How were they killed?'
>
> The man looked embarrassed and mildly shook his head.
>
> 'Chopped up like fish,' Pujil continued. 'It was Wan's father who gave the orders.'
>
> 'Pak Arjo saved the village,' put in Bu Mari, justifying. 'It wasn't murder, it was civil war.'
>
> 'Did they kill anybody in return?' I asked, which was my understanding of civil war.'[33]

While being anarchic as a nation when it comes to lacking rules

and laws that protect ordinary people, Indonesians are extremely disciplined in 'not understanding'. Although information is available online and even in many books recently published, the great majority choose not to know, not to search and not to question. When I was working on *Terlena* several years ago, I questioned several college-educated technocrats in one of the office buildings in central Jakarta. All, without exception, blamed the coup on the PKI. All insisted it should remain outlawed.

The historian Baskara T. Wardaya SJ, former director of PUSDEP and presently Fulbright scholar in residence (2011–12) at the University of California Riverside, in the United States, wrote to me to offer this explanation:

> For a long time the Indonesian history was written merely from a one-sided, government-oriented perspective. Any attempt to write differently was suppressed. The fall of the New Order government in 1998 opened doors for more democratic and multi-perspective ways of looking at and narrating Indonesia's past. The suppression remains in practice, albeit less openly, but many young historians brave the suppression and fight for the rights of Indonesians to better understand their own history.[34]

The story is brutally transparent to anybody who bothers to scratch just under the surface: it is easily unearthed on the internet. Many CIA documents have been declassified, and recent Wikileaks postings offer further details about the US involvement in the coup. Some technical questions remain, for instance the role of Kamaruzaman Sjam, a key member of PKI, in 1965 and whether he was a double agent working for the CIA.

What is clear is that the United States provided the initial death list to Suharto, 'Kap Gestapu' and other murderous groups, and infiltrated the ranks of the military-educated economists, who almost immediately privatized the most important natural resources and production facilities of the country. The other indisputable fact (to anyone who conducts first-hand research or travels for some time around the country) is that a nation that used to lead a large part of the developing world five decades ago has been reduced to a miserable, overpopulated, polluted, unhealthy and uneducated state, stumbling, with no direction and no purpose, religious to the extreme, intolerant and thoroughly confused. The entire country resembles a prisoner who was tortured for a prolonged period of time, deprived of contact with the surrounding world and kept in darkness.

THE NEW ORDER

After the coup, Suharto immediately sidelined President Sukarno, kept him under house arrest in Jakarta and later in Bogor, then took effective control of the government on March 12, 1966, and got himself appointed president in March, 1967 by the purged People's Consultative Assembly. Sukarno died, a broken man, on June 21, 1970.

All traces of Sukarno's enthusiasm and 'nation and character-building' optimism were wiped out within few months. The bizarre cult of 'the night of September 30th' was created. Every year, during the New Order years, the children of Indonesia were shown a surreal film depicting bloody images of the slaughter. Museums and statues were erected to project the image of the murdered officers as martyrs.

It is still received wisdom within large sections of the West, including politicians, the mass media and academics, that Indonesia since 1965 can be described as a great success. It is even offered as an example and inspiration for other countries, namely in the Arab world. To those who understand the true story, it serves better as a striking warning to the world.

Benedict Anderson wrote:

> The secrets of the ultra-secretive President – security failure, industrialization failure, financial failure, moral failure, parental failure (all his children either monsters or nonentities), even political failure – came oozing out bit by bit. For the irony of Suharto's story is that he was finally undone by the forces that had made his long dictatorship possible. In the early 1990s, he had been persuaded by Washington to 'open up' his country more widely to global financial capital. A lot of fast money flowed into a plethora of shady new banks created to take advantage of this sudden bonanza. By then Suharto was living on borrowed time. Indonesia had become a net importer of oil, and the forests were largely gone. Local industrial development was weak, and the education system had been decaying for years. When the 'Asian Crisis' broke out, Indonesia was hit harder than any other country. Within a few weeks the rupiah lost four-fifths of its exchange value. Dozens of banks went bankrupt. Millions of people lost their jobs. The national debt climbed dizzyingly. His toadies had long flattered him with the title of Bapak Pembangunan (Father of Development) but by the beginning of 1998, bitter local wits

> had turned it into Bapak Pembangkrutan (Father of Bankruptcy). Nothing more cruelly demonstrated this Waterloo than the photos of the haggard dictator at his desk while the capo of the IMF, arms akimbo, stands behind him, ultimatum symbolically in hand.[35]

During the so-called New Order (*Orde Baru*) Indonesia's resources and companies were privatized, cronyism became endemic and the country turned into a hybrid of feudalism and fascism, increasingly intolerant and intellectually isolated. All these issues will be visited in the following chapters, as I show how *Orde Baru* directly influenced all aspects of life, from the economy to the distribution of wealth, from religion to education.

Suharto stepped down on May 21, 1998 after prolonged and violent student protests. The legacy of his reign is almost intact.

Arguably the most intensive massacre since the Second World War had been planned and encouraged by the West, particularly by Washington and London. Indonesia was its target. That is partially why, until now, the West has been fully supportive of the regime that survived Suharto's era, which is presently comprised of a group of former generals (including the president), backed by the historically intolerant and self-righteous branch of Indonesian Islam. It even continues to praise the Indonesian political establishment and its religion, which has been described, entirely unjustifiably, as tolerant, democratic and moderate.

3

EXTREME CAPITALISM, INDONESIAN STYLE

> Here we encounter the Lacanian difference between reality and the Real: 'reality' is the social reality of the actual people involved in interaction and in the productive processes, while the Real is the inexorable 'abstract', spectral logic of capital that determines what goes on in social reality. One can experience this gap in a palpable way when one visits a country where life is obviously in shambles. We see a lot of ecological decay and human misery. However, the economist's report that one reads afterwards informs us that the country's economic situation is 'financially sound' – reality doesn't matter, what matters is the situation of capital …
>
> Slavoj Zizek, Slovenian philosopher[1]

> The economic situation in Indonesia is geared toward the domination of the foreign companies, the multi-national-enterprises. I'm not against capitalism, but it should be modified.
>
> Abdurrahman Wahid, former president of Indonesia[2]

> The markets can remain irrational longer than you can stay solvent.
>
> John Maynard Keynes[3]

In October 2011, a pipeline carrying gold and metal concentrates belonging to PT Freeport Indonesia leaked into the Outomona River in Papua. The news spread like lightning and hundreds, maybe thousands, of desperate people descended on the area. In dirt and mud, they were searching for concentrates like gold, silver and copper – for at least a tiny bit of those materials that made multinational companies rich, their country well-off on paper, but its people desperately poor. They needed these materials to help them to survive. The images carried by several newspapers looked shocking, not unlike those from the Congo/DRC. But then, many experts had been agreeing for decades that several social indicators in Indonesia

Photo 3.1 A group of Jakarta's poor hanging out under an elevated highway

are similar to those in sub-Saharan Africa, generally assumed to be the poorest part of the world.

At least some academics from the Asia Foundation and Australian National University (ANU) hold a very different opinion. In 2008, Andrew MacIntyre and Douglas Ramage published a widely circulated article titled 'Indonesia has changed, and so must our attitude to it'. Right from the beginning of the report they were arguing:

> Almost 10 years to the day since the fall of Suharto, it is time to start thinking of Indonesia as a normal country, grappling with many of the same challenges as other large, stable, middle-income developing democracies such as India, Mexico or Brazil. And Canberra needs to adjust ways in which it engages with it.
>
> To see Indonesia as a normal country is to take the suspicion, fear and mystery out of the picture. Too few Australians realize that Indonesia today is a stable, competitive democracy, playing a constructive role in world affairs. It is no longer in a state of profound flux and turmoil.[4]

If anyone wonders how devastating could be the full-blown attack of

fundamentalist capitalism on a poor developing country, they should travel to Indonesia. What would happen if all restraints, checks and balances, humanist principles, goodwill and logic were to suddenly disappear, giving way to naked greed and corruption? Indonesia could and should serve as the paradigm of such a horror scenario. Students, scholars, lawmakers, trade unionists and journalists from developing countries should be sent on obligatory trips here, to see what privatization, the destruction of the left, and the unopposed rule of businesses and pro-Western oligarchs can do to a nation.

THE ILLUSION OF ECONOMIC SUCCESS

Macroeconomically, Indonesia is doing just fine. Many in the Western mainstream argue that Indonesia is developing well. Its economy saw more than 6 per cent annual growth in 2011, when this chapter was written. Just open the English-language establishment newspaper, the *Jakarta Post*, and you will read confident litanies:

> Investment in Indonesia are expected to top Rp290 trillion (US$32.48 billion), a 20.83 percent rise from Rp40 trillion officially targeted this year, the Investment Coordinating Board (BKPM) says.
>
> After speaking at the 2011 Investor Summit and Market Expo in Jakarta … BKPM chairman Gita Wirjawan said the target could be higher whenever Indonesia got an investment grade, which was expected in the near future …
>
> In the first half of this year, Indonesia's economy grew 6.5 per cent, while the ratio of the government debt to gross domestic product (GDP) was 26 percent …
>
> Gita was upbeat that more investment would enter Indonesia in the upcoming months as investors could look to shift their investments to destinations with sound economic conditions.[5]

The article goes on about the 'tax holidays' the Indonesian government is offering to potential investors, and about how 'interesting' Indonesia is becoming for foreign businesspeople. All great news!

After the genocide of 1965, General Suharto applied to the national economy one of the most extreme forms of market doctrine (or what Naomi Klein calls 'shock therapy'). The fact that he and his military and Muslim religious cadres managed to immobilize all opposition by sheer fear inspired the West to try to roll out

similar systems all over the world. More precisely, Indonesia had been designated by US and European foreign policy, the IMF and business interests as one of the very first laboratories for the extremist teachings of pro-business fanatics like Milton Friedman and Friedrich von Hayek. Arguably it was a deliberate decision to test these theories in the developing world initially, since any protests could be expected to be more muted there than in the West or in Latin America.

John Roosa and Joseph Nevins wrote:

> Suharto's clique of army officers took power with a long-term economic strategy in mind. They expected the legitimacy of their new regime would derive from economic growth and that growth would derive from bringing in Western investment, exporting natural resources to Western markets, and begging for Western aid. Suharto's vision for the army was not in terms of defending the nation against foreign aggression but defending foreign capital against Indonesians. He personally intervened in a meeting of cabinet ministers in December 1965 that was discussing the nationalization of the oil companies Caltex and Stanvac. Soon after the meeting began, he suddenly arrived by helicopter, entered the chamber, and declared, as the gleeful U.S. embassy account has it, that the military 'would not stand for precipitous moves against oil companies.' Faced with such a threat, the cabinet indefinitely postponed the discussion. At the same time, Suharto's army was jailing and killing union leaders at the facilities of U.S. oil companies and rubber plantations.
>
> By now it is clear that the much ballyhooed economic growth of the Suharto years was severely detrimental to the national interest. The country has little to show for all the natural resources sold on the world market. Payments on the foreign and domestic debt, part of it being the odious debt from the Suharto years, swallow up much of the government's budget. With health care spending at a minimum, epidemic and preventable diseases are rampant. There is little domestic industrial production. The forests from which military officers and Suharto cronies continue to make fortunes are being cut down and burned up at an alarming rate. The country imports huge quantities of staple commodities that could be easily produced on a larger scale in Indonesia, such as sugar, rice, and soybeans. The main products of the villages now are migrant laborers, or 'the heroes of foreign exchange,' to quote from a lighted sign at the Jakarta airport.[6]

The Indonesian people were never given the choice of the direction in which their country should move. The muzzling of the non-aligned movement ideals and the opening-up of markets (read: allowing the plunder of Indonesian natural resources by local and international companies and cronies) – these were the plans that had to be implemented by all means, even at the expense of the loss of lives of millions of (arguably, to some Western interests) irrelevant Indonesian citizens.

The brutality, swiftness and efficiency of the Indonesian massacres and the consequent implementation of extreme market 'reforms' were inspired by planners in Washington and elsewhere. Several variations of this model – a coup followed by the plunder of natural resources and a free-market economy – were subsequently tried and implemented (to various degrees 'successfully') in Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Russia, Iraq and elsewhere. The US-sponsored Chilean coup on September 11, 1973, raped one of the oldest democracies in the world and clearly drew on the Indonesian experience. 'They used to tell us "Watch out, Jakarta is coming!"' recalled one older member of the Communist Party of Chile. 'We didn't know much about Jakarta then, but we sensed that they were threatening us with something terrible.'[7]

In *The Shock Doctrine*, Naomi Klein describes powerfully how economic teams from the United States participated in changing the progressive course of President Sukarno, and how the Indonesian experience acted as a template for similar coups and brutal atrocities all over Latin America and the world. It is worth quoting her conclusions at length:

> Of interest were not only Suharto's brutality but also the extraordinary role played by a group of Indonesian economists who had been educated at the University of California at Berkeley, known as the Berkeley Mafia. Suharto was effective at getting rid of the left, but it was the Berkeley Mafia who prepared the economic blueprint for the country's future.
>
> The parallels with the Chicago Boys were striking. The Berkeley Mafia had studied in the U.S. as part of a program that began in 1956, funded by the Ford Foundation. They had also returned home to build a faithful copy of a Western-style economics department, theirs at the University of Indonesia's Faculty of Economics. Ford sent American professors to Jakarta to establish the school, just as Chicago profs had gone to help set up the new economics department in Santiago. 'Ford felt it was training the

> guys who would be leading the country when Sukarno got out,' John Howard, then director of Ford's International Training and Research Program, bluntly explained.
>
> Ford-funded students became leaders of the campus groups that participated in overthrowing Sukarno, and the Berkeley Mafia worked closely with the military in the lead-up to the coup, developing 'contingency plans' should the government suddenly fall. These young economists had enormous influence over General Suharto, who knew nothing of high finance .... Another Berkeley grad described the relationship in this way: we 'presented to the army leadership – the crucial element in the new order – a "cookbook" of "recipes" for dealing with Indonesia's serious economic problems. General Suharto as the top army commander not only accepted the cookbook, but also wanted the authors of the recipes as his economic advisers.' Indeed he did. Suharto packed his cabinet with members of Berkeley Mafia, handing them all the key financial posts, including minister of trade and ambassador to Washington.
>
> ... the Berkeley Mafia could not have been more hospitable to foreign investors wanting to mine Indonesia's immense mineral and oil wealth, described by Richard Nixon as 'the greatest prize in Southeast Asia area.' They passed laws allowing foreign companies to own 100 percent of these resources, handed out 'tax holidays', and within two years, Indonesia's natural wealth – copper, nickel, hardwood, rubber and oil – was being divided up among the largest mining and energy companies in the world.[8]

'Conspiracy theories', said Hilda Rossieta, professor at the Faculty of Economics and Business at the University of Indonesia:[9] 'I believe in positivist textbooks. Maybe things like 1965 are far from my reality. Right now, I know we have a rotten system here, so what I am trying to do is to make at least some positive change in this rot.' After some time, she acknowledged thoughtfully, 'All economic knowledge we obtained here comes from the West.' Of course, she meant Milton Friedman and Friedrich von Hayek; definitely not John Maynard Keynes, later Joseph Stiglitz or, God forbid, Karl Marx.

THE COLLAPSE OF INTELLECTUAL INDONESIA

The destruction of the social state in Chile was cruel and damaging, but Indonesia's experience turned out to be far worse on a long-term basis. That is mostly because Chile before 1973, although not

rich, was a predominantly lower-middle-class country with a well-educated and socially aware population. It had considerable intellectual and creative competence and the ability to resist propaganda. Many of its leading writers, thinkers, film makers, and economists, at least those who survived the initial massacres, joined the opposition right from the start. Hundreds of thousands went into exile and fought from abroad, never leaving Pinochet and his regime in peace. Others joined the fight against the junta from within. Some went to the mountains and into direct combat, like the guerrilla group MIR.

In contrast, most Indonesian intellectuals were crushed without any significant resistance. Many were killed, including left-leaning economists; others, like novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer, were locked up for more than a decade in prisons and Buru Island concentration camp, their books burned and thoughts banned. As communism and all left-wing ideas were forbidden (disobeying this ban could mean death, torture, rape or lengthy imprisonment), the extreme pro-market regime faced little or no organized dissent. The road was clear for the experiment.

Professor Shin Yasui from Kobe University commented:

> Unlike democratic regimes in which political decisions are taken as a result of compromises among distinct political and social sectors, in authoritarian regimes the political leader didn't act necessarily in accordance with such compromises but often enjoyed considerable freedom to choose policies they prefer with little regard to social pressures.[10]

He continued:

> In the first years of their regimes both Pinochet and Suharto succeeded in concentrating the power in their hands, purging their adversaries within the regime, while heavily oppressing the opposition to the regime, which gave them considerable autonomy in making important political decisions.

David Ransom wrote as early as in 1970:

> Indonesia, which in the past fired the imagination of fortune-hunters and adventurers as the fabled East Indies, was long regarded as 'the richest colonial prize in the world.' Harking back to such times, Richard Nixon described Indonesia in 1967

> as 'the greatest prize in the Southeast Asian area' .... To cut the ribbon on the Indonesian side was an extraordinary team of economic ministers known to insiders as 'the Berkeley Mafia.' Sporting PhDs from the University of California and acting as a closely-knit clique in the councils of power, these men shaped the post-nationalist policies of the new regime. Behind their rise to eminence and power lay a saga of international intellectual intrigue, of philanthropoids and university projects, of student Generals and political Deans, and a sophisticated imperial design beyond Cecil Rhodes's wildest dreams.[11]

While Suharto and his cronies allowed the unbridled plunder of the Indonesian state's natural resources, there were at least some feeble attempts in the early years of his regime to retain a certain dose of nationalism and control of a few economic sectors. It was not much, but at least it helped. The 1997 Asian financial crisis changed everything.

THE AFTERMATH OF THE ASIAN FINANCIAL CRISIS

'Asian tigers' were often admired for their fast-growing economies and improving infrastructure (although Indonesia was definitely known more for its macroeconomic growth than for redistribution of wealth or infrastructure building), but the multinationals and market fundamentalists strongly disliked the fact that several 'tigers' were implementing social and nationalistic policies, particularly Malaysia and Thailand. It is now widely agreed that the financial crisis of 1997 was provoked and fed from outside, with the determined participation of the IMF. 'Structural adjustments' effectively destroyed tens of millions of middle-class families, from Indonesia to South Korea, as at least 20 million people in East Asia joined the ranks of the poor. Unsubstantiated 'bad news' spread like wildfire, reducing dramatically the value of local companies, and forcing their local owners to put them up for sale. Foreign businesspeople, 'investors' and bankers were scanning the entire region in search of bargains. No bailout was offered, but 'restructuring' was enforced, landing millions of Asians on the pavement as unemployment dramatically increased. Once again Asia was robbed, although the official terminology was that it was once more 'getting ready for business'.

Indonesia was not an exception. It had been plundered since 1965 by the local business clique and oligarchs, related to or blessed by

Suharto, but in the late 1990s, the most corrupt dictator of modern history was getting tired of sharing his loot with foreigners, and was becoming increasingly 'nationalistic' (which meant that he preferred to keep the 'profits' inside the country, and preferably in the pockets of his direct and extended family). Such an approach was not to be tolerated by the IMF and the market crusaders. Soon after the 1997 crisis was provoked, Suharto found his back against the wall, and the IMF and the market were on the offensive. He was soon forced to call back his old (by then, mostly retired) Berkeley Mafia team, headed by its 'dean', Widjojo Nitisastro, to negotiate with the IMF. The result was that the IMF and the international business community got almost all they wanted.

Much stronger countries in economic terms suffered greatly. For example, South Korea was screaming in pain, and its proud conglomerates like Samsung and Daewoo were forced to break up and offer themselves to foreign 'investors'; its social security net was collapsing and unemployment, poverty and suicide rates were on the rise. In this context Indonesia, still terrified by its rulers after the 1965 massacres and brainwashed by the consistent 'New Order' propaganda, once again allowed itself to be brutally robbed in broad daylight.

Utilities, communications, transportation and energy – all were suddenly up for grabs. The French company Lyonnaise des Eaux and the British Thames Water took over the water supply in Jakarta. Even the pro-business weekly the *Economist* wrote that consequently prices went up dramatically while the quality fell,[12] an understatement, considering that Indonesian cities now have a worse drinking water supply than cities in India and Bangladesh. Bechtel got to build an oil refinery in Sulawesi, while the Canadian Westcoast Energy snapped up a huge power plant project.

'The general condition of PDAM [the Indonesian drinking water company] before privatization was not healthy financially, as we booked big losses,' explained Imamsyah Roesli from PT Palyja in an interview for this book.[13] 'This was because the operation was not really a company, although its name had the word "company" in it.' The implication of this was that the water supply to the public was supposed to operate at a profit, although this was unthinkable almost anywhere in the developed world. Profiteering over water supplies caused riots and brought down the government in Bolivia, for example. Mr Roesli concluded:

The situation was reported to the President in 1995–96. As a result,

> the Cendana Group entered the scene with Sigit Harjojudanto bringing an investor from France – Lyonnaise de Eaux – because there were already two installations in Pejompongan that were built by them in the 1950s. Later, Bambang Trihatmodjo, one of the sons of the President, brought another giant from UK, Thames Water.

For the rest of Suharto's dictatorship and throughout the years after he stepped down, in a process cynically called *reformasi*, a tremendous privatization drive further impoverished this already miserable country. The irrational privatization reached the level of hysteria, and the only reason that at least some companies were still in Indonesian hands by 2011 was their unattractiveness and bad financial state.

Indonesia was wide open for business; meaning, for further plunder. The aim to stimulate local production was abandoned. Instead of supporting local industries, the Indonesian government spent less on science and research than any other major country in the world.

'In my opinion, ideally the government should prioritize local industry, but there is nothing like that here', said Susilo Hadi Sumarsono, former president director of the Indonesian company PT Infokom Elektrindo:

> I am all for market protection. If a newly born baby is forced to compete with a giant, then the baby will never grow. That's why all that thrives in Indonesia are so-called creative industries. Such industries do not need extensive support and the regulations for such industries are relatively loose, while the competition from the giants not so big. By now I have lost all my hopes for Indonesia to have good local industry, with creative industries being an exception.[14]

In striking contrast to the Chinese approach (the Chinese government strongly supports domestic production), the Indonesian regime left local companies unfunded and unsupported, pleasing the international business elites and the IMF but clearly failing its own nation.

To return to economic growth, it is important to analyse the background to the 6 per cent growth in the Indonesian economy in 2010. The mainstream Western media suggested that Indonesia was about to add another 'I' to the new wave of successful BRIC

economies (Brazil, Russia, India and China). Very little was said about the facts that Indonesia, in stark contrast to the BRIC nations, had almost no substantial research or scientific base, an extremely low level of education and productivity, and no coherent social policy. The growth reflected its export of unprocessed raw materials and high commodity prices on the world markets.

One of the exceptions to the applauding crowd was the *Economist*, which reported on July 21, 2011:

> Last year Indonesia had one of the best-performing economies in the G20 club, growing by 6%. Even as the rating agencies busily revise rich countries' creditworthiness downwards, Indonesia's has been going the other way. It is now only a notch below investment grade. Indonesians think their economy could soon join the informal club of Brazil, Russia, India and China as a leader of the new world economic order: they want to be among the BRIICs.
>
> Yet this is optimistic. Like Brazil, but unlike China and India, Indonesia owes much of its success to nothing smarter or more high-tech than a commodities boom. Coal and gas go to China and India, palm oil to the world. Money is pouring into the country, yet little goes into fixing long-term problems that impede growth. Indonesia has a once-in-a-generation chance to move beyond its commodities-based economy. It is not clear it will take it.
>
> At the moment, consumption accounts for almost half of GDP growth.[15]

It should be noted that compared with Indonesia, even Brazil has an impressive scientific base. Its Embraer is the fourth largest aircraft company in the world; the country puts its own satellites into orbit, builds and manages gigantic hydro-electric and nuclear power plants, and is the greatest manufacturer of urban and inter-city buses in the world. Its agriculture is renowned all over the world for both quality and efficiency.

The *Economist* continued:

> James Castle, a consultant and former head of Indonesia's International Business Chamber, argues that, whereas big companies used to be able to ignore Indonesia for more obvious destinations, nowadays 'if you're not here, you have to have a reason.' That is a big change. But Mr Castle also gives warning that too many companies do find a reason – and certainly do not

set up manufacturing plants. Unlike in regional competitors such as Vietnam, manufacturing has lagged behind almost every other sector of the economy. It is noticeable that a high share of the new consumer desirables is imported.

For Indonesia remains, in many respects, a hard country to do business in, especially compared with the rest of the region. Its infrastructure is poor, adding hugely to production costs. Almost every other neighbour is building new ports or expanding old ones, but Indonesia's lag far behind in efficiency and productivity. In the World Bank's 2010 Logistics Performance Index, it ranks a lowly 75th, well below Thailand, Malaysia and even the Philippines. This means a lot of foreign investment that might want to go to Indonesia now goes elsewhere.

And then there are continuing problems of corruption and what Mr Castle calls 'non-transparent random regulations', which he says are the biggest impediments to business.[16]

'Many people are now saying that Indonesia is becoming one of the biggest economies in the world', said Bustar Maitar, senior

Photo 3.2 A polluted village in Karawang Regency West Java. There are similar scenes in many other villages all over the archipelago.

forest campaigner of Greenpeace Southeast Asia (SEA), during our meetings in Jakarta in 2011:

> It is clear that this is because it has huge natural resources: there is oil and gas exploration, there is mining and timber as well as palm oil. As all this is being extracted and export is being calculated in money terms, the conclusion is that Indonesia is growing and becoming important economically.
>
> But what people don't realize is that foreign countries see Indonesia only as a source of raw materials, nothing else. They are not interested in processing those raw materials in Indonesia, to add value to them. So if we are not careful, soon there will be nothing left. Just devastated land – floods, landslides, and forest fires. And with the climate change added, soon we will not be even able to plant rice or to fish in [waters] off our coast.
>
> Recently, there was a story in *Forbes* which clearly indicated that most of what they call 'top 100 businesspeople' in Indonesia are those not in manufacturing but in businesses connected to extraction of natural resources: Sinarmas, Bakrie, Raja Garuda Mas, Sampurna, even tobacco giant Djarum and Medco which recently expanded to palm oil.

Indonesia sold off its forests, its oil and gas, but it has been unable to design or produce almost anything tangible that it could sell abroad. The Bandung-based civil airplane project patently failed: the twin-engine short-haul aircraft never impressed international customers and suffered from several fatal accidents. The automobile industry simply assembled outdated foreign models, mainly Toyotas, while domestically produced buses would look pathetic even by the Soviet Union standards of the 1970s, and most of them are even more polluting. The labour force is so badly educated, and corruption so rampant, that most foreign electronic companies have moved elsewhere – first to Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia, later to China and Vietnam.

Although it once dreamed of competing with its neighbours, post-Suharto Indonesia since 2008 could not even begin to keep pace with Vietnam, once one of the poorest and most devastated countries in Asia. 'And what do the Indonesian people get in return for all that plunder and mismanagement? Nothing!' lamented Maitar:

> Politicians and business people use slogans like 'Palm Oil for People'. We did our own research and came to the conclusion

that there is approximately 2.1 million hectares used by palm oil plantations all over Indonesia. Government data shows only 1.1 million hectares. And it is only extraction, nothing to do with development of the industry, no value added for Indonesians. On the ground, if the palm oil prices go up on the world markets, there is no positive impact on the farmers. But when they go down, farmers are made to suffer. There are 8 million palm oil plantations in Indonesia. Forty per cent to 50 per cent belong to smallholders. But their productivity is only 3 tons per hectare while in Malaysia it is 7 tons. Even big companies in Indonesia can average 6–7 tons. So nobody cares about the small plantations, and government does nothing to improve the productivity of the small farms. It is in striking contrast to what is happening in Brazil. There, farmers get dedicated support from the state.

The problem is that this country is not run by anybody. We are just trying to feel our way forward and somehow stay alive in the process.

A FOG OF STATISTICS

Terrible educational standards have left the great majority of Indonesian people vulnerable to state propaganda and manipulation. The system continuously hides and confuses statistical data and deceives the public. Nobody really knows how wealth is distributed or the exact economic indicators for the country. How could they be known if even data on the total number of people inhabiting the archipelago cannot be taken for granted, which makes it impossible to measure the economic performance or social situation? The government-released data claim that there are 237 million Indonesians inhabiting the archipelago. But is it true?

Scott Murray,[17] one of the world's leading statisticians, who has worked in Indonesia on many occasions, explained:

> The best estimates that we have seen are indicating that Indonesian population is somewhere around 300 million people; approaching that or slightly below or slightly above, and the fact that we don't know for sure is due to the inadequacy of the census count, which has lots of room for undercounting the population.

Our prolonged discussion took place in 2010 in the Rwandan city of Gisenii, on the Rwanda-Congo/DRC border in Africa. Murray

was on a statistical training mission in Rwanda, sponsored by the UNESCO. He added:

> This comes from working with the bureaucrats who actually have an interest in knowing what the real number is, because if they don't use the real number they end up underestimating the size of the problem they have to deal with, and this does them no good in the long run, as that means they can't attract enough money to make the differences they need.

Murray said that the only other country he knew that was hiding the real number of its citizens was Pakistan.

It is logical that flawed population data can make per-capita economic indicators look better. In addition, those who do not make it to the statistics tend to be the poorest of the poor, and their exclusion improves Indonesia's apparent performance under other indicators.

Almost all economists agree that the Indonesian economy essentially relies on exploitation (it could as well be called plundering) of the country's natural resources by both foreign multinationals and local companies. That is where the economic growth comes from, and that is where investment goes. What appears in statistics as 'manufacturing' is mostly a form of *maquiladoras* – assembly lines for foreign, mainly Western and Japanese, companies (Indonesia assembles cars, it still handles some electronic goods, it produces garments, and so on). There is very little value-added production, and almost nothing in terms of indigenously developed products.

The source of growth is on the mind of Eva Kusuma Sundari, one of the most progressive representatives in the Indonesian parliament:

> I had plenty of talks and complaints about this issue with the former Minister of Finance Sri Mulyani. I also raised the same issue with Mr Agus, when I was a member of the Komisi XI.[18] I asked them, why do you direct this country towards consumption, while most of the subsidies are there to trigger spending? There are hardly any subsidies designed to strengthen our industry or to improve UMKM [micro, small and medium-sized businesses]. So the source of growth that we have now is from consumption. There are even government subsidies for consumers – enabling them to spend more and more. Our wealth comes only from the natural resources. There is no growth from production. It means

> that even though we have some serious mining taking place here, the value added goes to the multinational companies, not to the people. And we only get some percentage, which is very small. For instance, from Freeport we only receive 1 per cent and it is not different with other mining ventures. We are actually fooling ourselves, because most of the profits don't go to this nation at all – they go to the developed countries. Again, we could observe this on the example of Freeport – wherever it is mining, the rate of poverty goes up. The life expectancy in the area where the company operates is also very low, often the lowest in the country. It stands at 56 years, compared with Jakarta where it is well over 70. That is truly ironic and it proves that we can't get any benefits from the rich world that exploits our natural resources.[19]

According to Reuters, major miners in Indonesia include Freeport-McMoran Copper & Gold Inc, Newmont Corp and a unit of Vale. BHP Billiton and top nickel producer Norilsk Nickel have operations in the country.[20]

Darwin Zahedy Saleh, energy and mines minister, has hinted that the Indonesian government would like to seek the periodic renegotiation of royalties paid by mining companies, but so far he has given no details or timeframe. There are no suggestions for how the higher royalties would be distributed or whether the great majority of Indonesians would benefit from them. To date most of the royalties from mining that have been paid to the Indonesian Government are unaccounted for, and it is generally assumed that a large proportion has disappeared in corrupt payments to officials. The payments buy new apartments and villas for Indonesian officials, in Singapore, California and elsewhere.

To challenge this arrangement could be extremely dangerous: Indonesian citizens, particularly those in Aceh and Papua but also in many other parts of the country, are tortured, beaten and intimidated whenever they dare to criticize the arrangements between foreign multinational companies and the Indonesian state. Many activists have disappeared or been assassinated.

It is widely agreed that the plundering of natural resources (among them crude oil, natural gas, tin, timber, copper and gold) and unusually high commodity prices in 2010 and 2011 enriched only a very small group of Indonesians, but it did help to register solid economic growth on the balance sheets of the government, international organizations and on the pages of foreign periodicals.

'Indonesia is very important for global markets. But why?' – asked Bustar Maitar from Greenpeace SEA-Indonesia. 'Because it produces raw materials desperately needed abroad. Once raw materials are gone, so will the importance of Indonesia in the world.'[21]

Umar Juoro, a member of Bank Indonesia's Supervisory Board, would like to see higher economic growth, but in a form which requires improved infrastructure and a manufacturing sector. He also sees an urgent need to eradicate poverty:

> In my opinion, if we can develop infrastructure and the government can facilitate investment especially in the manufacturing sector, the economic growth can be more than 7 per cent. Actual government spending is still low. The bad infrastructure (electricity, roads and ports) is obstructing the flow of investment to this country. The government's plan is good only on paper but very weak in terms of executing and implementing it.[22]

That is partly because the differentiation between the government, big business and even the top brass of the military has almost completely disappeared. All these elements from the so-called 'elites' are united in impoverishing the country, stealing what is still left from the great majority who are poor. All this is done with the blessing, and often participation, of religious groups, whose main goal is to prevent the return of Marxists or even moderately socially oriented elements.

Juoro concluded:

> If we have high growth of the economy with support from investment and labour-intensive manufacturing industry, then jobs will be widely available and we can significantly eradicate poverty. The current 6 per cent economic growth did not create many jobs and did not achieve much in poverty reduction (only 1 million people). Providing better education and health would also help a lot to reduce poverty.
>
> The government policy on reducing poverty is very weak. The health service for poor people is getting worse. The local government has very little role in the effort to reduce poverty.

What Western economic interests appear to have hoped for during the 1965 genocide and later during the 1997–98 structural adjustment process came true only partially. The veins of Indonesia were opened, to borrow an expression from the great Uruguayan thinker

and writer Eduardo Galeano. Natural resources began flowing out and foreign companies were allowed to move in. But the Indonesian garuda – the fabled bird that is used as a national symbol – never managed to fly. It is sitting in the barn, its wings clipped – enormous but battered, more like an overgrown chicken ready for the oven rather than an eagle. The country has never inspired anybody, despite the insistence from the West that it ought to. A brief visit by any objective and open-minded individual, and the truth is unveiled – the third or fourth (depending which statistics are correct) most populous nation on Earth is a failed state. It has not failed the oligarchs and the companies, but it has certainly failed the majority of its citizens.

POVERTY IN INDONESIA

Almost half a century after the coup that brought Suharto to power, Indonesia remains one of the poorest and least developed countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Around 60 per cent of its people live in poverty, subsisting on less than US$2 per day,[23] and 29.4 per cent (almost one-third of the entire population) live in absolute poverty, on below US$1.25 per day.[24] These figures are based on official statistics, and as I have explained, even those for the total Indonesian population are incorrect, so the real statistics would definitely be even more disturbing.

The Indonesian state recognizes only 13.33 per cent (or 31 million) of its population as poor. That is because Jakarta's definition of poverty (the official poverty line, rural and urban average) is only Rp211.726 a month,[25] which at the exchange rate at the time of writing equated to a meagre US$24.81.[26] Even then the numbers do not add up. Unwilling to antagonize the Indonesian government, international organizations and Western governments, organizations and institutions tend to accept the official data or provide favourable estimates.[27]

It is worth looking too at how both the Indonesian government and the World Bank define the middle class in Indonesia. The official definition is a person who spends a minimum of US$2.00 a day. It should be borne in mind that food prices in Indonesia are higher than those in Germany or the United States. A large percentage of the middle class, according to the *Jakarta Post* and the World Bank, live on between US$2.00 and US$4.00 a day. The upper-middle class, who spend US$10 to US$20 a day on average, make up only 1.3 per cent of the entire middle-class demographic.[28]

Photo 3.3 A sneak preview of what lies ahead: total gridlock in front of the train station in Kota, the historic area of Jakarta. Almost all experts predict that the city will come to a standstill by 2014.

In any other country in the world this would be reported as the best joke of the year: in a country where the cost of living is higher than in any other country in Southeast Asia, except Singapore and Brunei (and the kind of goods that typify middle-class spending tend to be particularly expensive), it is laughable to consider someone as upper-middle class with just US$300 a month. But it is only by using this kind of logic and twisted statistics that Indonesia can be considered a developing country on a par with others in the region.

'Can people live on $1 a day and not be considered poor?' the *Economist* asked on August 3, 2011.[29] The Indonesian government clearly thought so, judging by the updated data from the Central Statistics Agency on which the story was based:

> The statistics agency data, released on July 1st, says that only 12.5 per cent of Indonesia's population, or just over 30m, can be classified as poor, down from 31m in 2010. Officials note that the figure decreased despite the government's raising the poverty line by about $2.60 for this year. That should hardly be considered a result worth celebrating however, given Indonesia's

> booming economy, which could grow by as much as 7 per cent this year, and its status as a darling of international investors. The government led by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono should be equally concerned by a number of developmental indicators that put Indonesia, a proud member of the G20, on par with sub-Saharan Africa.

'I just came back from Riau, a very wealthy province with 8 per cent economic growth and trillions of rupiah in their annual budget,' I was told by leading Indonesian human rights lawyer Todung Mulya Lubis. 'But they said that there are at least 1 million people that do not have electricity there.'[30]

By Indonesian standards, Riau (which has around 6 million inhabitants) is truly wealthy, even judging by access to electricity. This figure suggests that around 16.7 per cent of the population lack access to power, while according to the *Jakarta Post*,[31] only 65 per cent of Indonesian households overall have access, meaning that 35 per cent, or around 92 million, live in darkness.

During our conversation with Pramoedya Ananta Toer in 2004, he lamented:

> Today's poor people have been impoverished by the elites. Before independence, the colonizers robbed them; now they are robbed by the elites. Poverty existed under Sukarno because our country was besieged by Western powers. All Western countries were antagonistic toward us, and the domestic economy hadn't developed. During Suharto's era, it was totally different: he allowed Western money and Western investment to enter the country. Every time an amount of Western capital was invested in Indonesia, much more had to be squeezed from us in return, because capitalism only cares about higher and higher returns.
>
> During Sukarno's rule, almost everybody was equally poor. If there was corruption at that time, only a small amount of money was involved. Present-day corruption involves billions and billions of dollars.[32]

Things have certainly changed. If commodity prices rise or remain at the present high level, it is expected that soon the country will have around 100,000 dollar millionaires.

On October 9, 2011, Al Jazeera reported the World Bank's prediction that Indonesian growth would continue despite the worldwide economic downturn.

> The rising price of Indonesia's natural resources is helping to create a fast-growing middle class, and a group of super-rich citizens. By 2015, it is estimated that Indonesia will have over 100,000 millionaires, despite half of the population still living on $2 a day.

But the same World Bank report warned about declining social indicators, as the *Christian Science Monitor* reported:

> Indonesia's combined power generation is less than South Africa's, which has roughly 200 million fewer people. Piped water supply, which only reaches half the population, is dropping. Road coverage relative to land mass is among the lowest in Southeast Asia. In Jakarta, the capital, only 2 percent of the population has access to septic facilities.
>
> 'You expect that in a post-conflict country, but not a place like Indonesia,' says Mr. Dress-Gross.[33]

My own experiences suggest that even the figures relating to US$2 a day are open to question. Interviewing dozens of families in Java, Sumatra, Sumba, Sulawesi, Sumbawa and elsewhere, I arrived at the conclusion that an average Indonesian family of four in the countryside lives on approximately US$50–60 a month. That makes at the most 50 US cents a day per person. Of course, the greater the number of the poor, the more money sits at the highest end. That explains the new private jets and yachts, as well as the golf courses and clubs growing all around the country.

The new rich seem to have no fear any more. They flaunt their wealth in public, while the percentage of the poor in Indonesia is growing, and if statistician Scott Murray is correct, tens of millions of the poorest men, women and children are not even included in the official statistics.

There are many examples of how the present economic system has destroyed the social fabric of the Indonesian archipelago, creating brutal and extreme disparities. Some of the most terrifying cases can be found in the deep countryside – in inaccessible areas of the country. Although my experiences have covered many places in Indonesia, there is not sufficient space here to describe all the parts of the country where market fundamentalism has helped to uphold feudalism and ruin the lives of the majority of Indonesian people. I have chosen to conclude this chapter by focusing on Bali and Jakarta, two places that

are familiar to many Western readers. Both the tourism-designated island and the capital city conceal some shocking realities behind the sterile facades of luxury hotels and shopping malls.

BALI

Ubud used to be one of the most serene places in Asia: a small town of 8,000 inhabitants built on lush green tropical hills in the middle of the 'Island of Gods' – Bali. Its rivers flowed through deep and mysterious valleys and ravines; its stories and fairy tales could fill dozens of books; its painters – some of the most talented in Asia – had a tremendous influence on modern art in Indonesia and far beyond.

Fifteen years ago, when I first arrived in Bali, Ubud had no more than a few dozen cars, a limited number of home-stays and restaurants, but dozens of art galleries and one important art museum near the old royal palace. Music was everywhere – performed just for fun by local artists seated on wide bamboo platforms. The royal palace itself hosted nightly performances of *ramayana*, as well as a great variety of refined and elaborate local dances. It was possible to see the *barong* dance, *legong* and *kecak* in every village and all around Ubud, for free as well as in venues that charged a fee. Several renowned foreign painters called this place home, including the now deceased Spanish artist Don Antonio Blanco, revered by many as the second Salvador Dali.

But nothing lasts forever, and especially not in post-1965 Indonesia. Ubud was 'discovered' by hordes of foreign tourists, developers, money-launderers and foreign consultants. The serenity and breathtaking beauty were suddenly seen not just as something to admire and blend into, but also as assets, commodities. People saw an opportunity for business to expand, and to make substantial profits.

In the late 1990s, Ubud suddenly became chic. Art critics from New York and London were often spotted at the marble tables of newly built international cafés, discussing the local style of epic painting, music and dance, drinking imported Australian wine while munching on vegetarian snacks. Prices began to climb, slowly but steadily. The places previously occupied by respectful and modest dreamers and artists from all corners of the globe were increasingly upgraded to pubs and reggae bars. For a time, Ubud put up some resistance. The royal family banned the construction of American

fast-food joints and any large buildings in the area. But then came the Asian financial crisis of 1997. The IMF intervened in its usual style, causing near-starvation even here, in the heart of Bali. I still remember carrying sacks of rice from Jakarta to my friends in Ubud.

The local currency collapsed, and foreign tourists, afraid of violence and instability, disappeared. Riots in Jakarta brought down the American-backed military dictator Suharto. Most of the locals lost their jobs and became extremely poor within two years.

In dollar terms, real estate became unreasonably cheap, and 'smart investors' from Java and abroad took immediate advantage of the situation. Many Balinese families, bordering on starvation, were forced by their financial circumstances to sell their land in order to survive. Although foreigners cannot buy land in Indonesia, many managed to team up with locals and push through shady deals, which allowed them to take control of a substantial part of Ubud's land.

Of course, the same was happening all around Bali, and on neighbouring Lombok and other islands. The land grab was tremendous. Hotels, resorts and luxury villas pushed away local people from the coast. There was enormous migration: unreported, silent and terrible.

Back in Ubud, the new wave of migrants had hardly any emotional ties to the place. They saw an opportunity and they grabbed it, mostly disregarding the local culture, architecture and lifestyle. New boutiques – mostly stocked with counterfeit goods – began to pollute the main streets of the town. Outrageously expensive-looking restaurants, decorated with marble and Balinese stones, but with almost no customers, scarcely hid the fact that their main purpose was to provide money-laundering opportunities for corrupt Javanese officials and business elites. Upmarket spas began offering 'treatments' for over US$100 a time.

Most of the home-stays disappeared, international-style cafés replaced local *warungs*, and traditional Balinese music performances became overtly commercialized, charging five to seven times the entrance fees of ten years previously. In just two years, the price of land in Ubud and its vicinity tripled or even quadrupled.

Several years ago, sitting in the Café Luna, an Australian-Balinese health-food joint, I overheard a conversation between two businessmen from the United Kingdom. 'Something has to be done about those backpackers who think they can live here on 30 to 40 dollars a day,' raved one of them, gobbling down organic salad. 'This

place is already upmarket, but not upmarket enough. Correctly, they are introducing some expensive extravaganzas in the area, like an elephant safari. I calculate that if they get it right, the travel industry here can generate between US$115 and 120 per person per day.'

Nowadays, a small Belgian beer – a brand such as Leffe – costs US$13 in this restaurant, while a bottle of the cheapest Chilean wine goes for US$50. Ten years ago someone could live an extremely comfortable life on US$10 to 15 per day, including lodging and food. Almost nobody then had heard about the 'travel industry' or any 'extravaganza'.

Of course, those who suffer the most from the current trend are the inhabitants of Ubud themselves. In the old days, travellers might only have spent US$10 a day, but it went directly to the local people. They were renting out rooms in their traditional compounds, doing the cooking and laundry, pocketing the profits. After being forced to sell the land to Javanese and foreign developers, the locals became nothing more than employees, receiving meagre salaries, and losing all hope of buying their land back. To buy 100 square metres in Ubud now costs at least US$20,000. A small house requires at least 200 square metres, so the land cost is US$40,000, plus the cost of the building itself. The average annual income of an officially employed Indonesian is around US$900.

Ubud is now full of motor vehicles. It is choked with traffic; cars and terribly polluting scooters, like those that swarm over Jakarta, dominate the streets. The whole village now looks like one enormous parking lot with souvenir stalls. This phenomenon is easy to explain: locals who sold their land bought new motor vehicles – a status symbol everywhere in Indonesia. A few years from now, the cars will be nothing more than rusting pieces of metal. The people of Ubud will have nothing more to sell: there will be no land, no cars, and no money, just subsistence salaries. They will not be able to afford to live in their own town any more.

In Ubud, business development and globalization destroyed with lightning speed one of the greatest and most original places in the world. The culture was irreversibly damaged. Kitsch replaced noble art forms; paintings are now mass-produced. Silence and the sounds of geckos and frogs were replaced by the constant noise that is now typical of Indonesia: car engines, the tooting of horns and cheap pop music. The entire town now looks like one overgrown bazaar. There is no free traditional music anywhere, because the locals have no time to play just for fun. Performing for tourists has become a business.

The only places where local (in this area, mostly Hindu) culture seems to survive are the local temples. But religion makes demands as well: its ceremonies consume big chunks of family budgets. And, as with Islam in Java, Hindu religiousness in Bali is taken to the extreme. It is not unusual to see children running barefoot while adults are burning money (literally, not just in figurative terms) at Hindu ceremonies. It is also important to recall that it was not only Muslim communities who participated in the massacres of 1965. Bali was, on a per capita basis, the island with the most intensive and terrible killing fields.

The 'paradise island' is just a façade. Bali has became like an enormous Soviet-era hard currency shop, an escape for those Javanese who eat pork and drink beer, a place where women can walk around in shorts, and a place for foreigners where they do not face insults like *bule* (a common insult for Caucasians which means 'albino') and can pretend that they are in a 'normal' country.

The craft and souvenir shops offer standardized products, and to get to them the foreigners have to jump over deep and dangerous holes in the sidewalks, avoid being hit by scooters and cars, and suffer being bullied by touts. Ubud hardly looks like a resort now. And the number of injured foreigners is striking: it is common to see people with broken legs in casts, cuts and bruises, and so on.

Most of the artists – local and foreign – have by now disappeared. Some went to Jakarta, others moved further east to Lombok, or left Indonesia altogether. The only people who have gained from the recent trends seem to be investors, developers and upmarket hotel operators. Harmony has been replaced by frustration and anger. Now even in Ubud, the obscene disparities in wealth are evident. Rich tourists have gained one more spot where they can sip their standardized lattes and shop until they drop. The locals and those outsiders who first admired this small town in the middle of the lush green jungle have lost their first or second home forever.

Ubud now has an annual Writers and Readers Festival, which is frequented mainly by Malaysian and other friendly foreign writers. It is clearly an attempt to give cultural legitimacy to this intellectually collapsed nation. Again, it might at a glance be taken as proof that Indonesia is a 'normal' country. No heavyweight critics of Indonesia are invited.

Barongs, the mythical lion-dragons that are the personification of good spirits, used to be the proud lords and masters of Ubud.

They were celebrated by elaborate dances and loved by almost all Balinese. Now their big eyes observe sadly from the walls of countless souvenir shops, as their small town has changed from being a mysterious, quiet, spiritual tropical art heaven to a polluted, ugly and overpriced parking lot.

JAKARTA

All hopes for Jakarta should be abandoned. The most unliveable major city in the Asia-Pacific will not improve: not any time soon, nor in the foreseeable future.

They used to shout 'Jakarta is coming!' to frighten left-wing governments in Chile and elsewhere in the world. Jakarta is now here, in its full glory, a monument to unbridled capitalism: a monster, a warning, and a reminder of how low humanity can sink in its irrational greed and selfishness.

Imagine an enormous city, one of the most polluted in the world, without public parks, with hardly any usable sidewalks, where shops and services are behind walls instead of on the street, where ugly billboards (many of them advertising cigarettes) and terrible architecture are the major visual 'feasts' available. A city with almost no waste management, where garbage is burned in the middle of residential neighbourhoods and collected by ancient carts pulled by coolies dressed in rags.

The city is a seaport but has almost no public access to the sea, except at one tiny and pathetic park that charges an exorbitant (compared with local incomes) entrance fee and is crammed with eateries and chain restaurants. Jakarta has no sea promenades like those in Manila, Mumbai, Doha, or even Dili in Timor-Leste or Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea; it counts no public beaches like Rio de Janeiro, Lima, Chennai, Dakar or Cape Town. There are no great parks like those in all major Chinese cities. In fact, there is almost nothing public here.

'To a greater or smaller extent, all cities that I visited are built for the people', commented George Burchett, Australian painter, and son of legendary journalist Wilfred Burchett. 'Except Jakarta, which was built against the people!'[34]

In an unforgettable novel by Graham Greene, *Our Man in Havana* (1958), the British secret service decides to demote its agent Beatrice by reassigning her to Jakarta from Cuba. Her colleagues are shocked, begging their boss not to opt for such a terrible punishment. Greene's choice of Jakarta as the ultimate disaster posting comes as

no surprise: for much of the last century, Jakarta had been saddled with a reputation as a poverty-ridden hellhole. Even Nixon, one of the least compassionate US presidents, noticed this and mentioned it in his memoirs. But since Graham Greene's days, the city has made a kind of 'progress'. On top of the remaining miserable and unliveable urban sprawl, it has become increasingly segregated, not unlike South African cities during the apartheid era. It is now divided between slums and ghettos, cynically called *kampungs* (villages), and gated communities and malls for the rich.

The city is truly hellish. It is possible to drive through it for hours and encounter no visually pleasing corner. Everything appears to be in decay, often even part-constructed buildings. Metal sheets, decayed fences: everything is in disrepair.

The stupidity of the city planning can only be matched by the idiocy of the development of the country as a whole, of which Jakarta is a microcosm. To make a U-turn, you often have to drive for a kilometre or more, adding to traffic jams, fuel consumption and pollution. Because of the way the city has been designed (or not designed), you often have to drive a fair distance even in order to get across the street, as there are hardly any passable sidewalks or street crossings. Nothing is connected here, and the car lobby has managed to buy and corrupt several layers of the government, as a result forming a resistance to the construction of any efficient public transportation network. Whatever their circumstances, people have little option but to use a car or one of the increasingly popular cheap and heavily polluting scooters (locals wishfully call them 'motorbikes'). Then people rot in *macet* – the legendary traffic jams.

Unlike in Vietnam or China, there is no public discussion of plans for the city. Citizens are not even informed about plans to demolish or build something in their own neighbourhoods. Construction just begins or halts with absolute disregard for public opinion. It is a perfect system for business executives. The distinction between business and government is increasingly blurred, and the rest of the people are seen as irrelevant. This what is described as a 'striving democracy' by Western politicians and their servile mass media.

The network of railroads that was built by the Dutch in colonial times has shrunk dramatically, and the train stations have deteriorated. Bus ways, one of the latest streaks of madness of the local administration, were supposed to copy the efficient transit system in the Colombian city of Bogota, but the local Indonesian companies immediately began cheating on every contract, and pocketing large

sums of money instead of delivering quality goods. The delivery of even low-quality buses is constantly delayed, and the automatic doors between the platforms and buses do not function, meaning that people regularly fall under the wheels of approaching vehicles. The elevators that were supposed to guarantee access for handicapped people were never built. The road crossings that connect bus stops are made from thin metal sheets full of dangerous holes with corroded edges. There is close to no enforcement of traffic laws, and private vehicles frequently block the so-called bus ways.

A monorail system was supposed to be built but the money disappeared, leaving ugly metal and concrete towers, which have been sticking pointlessly into the air for years. There were no serious enquiries, no public discussion, and no protests. In the end, in the grand and purely Indonesian way of resolving issues, it was decided – by whom nobody knows – that the towers would be used for an elevated highway. This seems to me (and to many) a horror scenario that will finally and patently ruin those few semi-aesthetic corners of the city that remain.

No historic city in the world looks more appalling than Kota, the historic sector of Jakarta, which was once an architectural jewel resembling a small Amsterdam. But while Havana under the US embargo kept appearing on the pages of the Western media as a warning of what communism could mean for culture, old Jakarta got away with much worse and escaped scrutiny.

Here it is absolutely clear that there is neither the ability nor any willingness to restore anything beautiful, anything 'public', or anything from the past. This is not some sort of anti-colonial revenge because the Dutch built Kota, since even worse decay can be observed at countless indigenous monuments of great significance in East and West Java and in other cities.

The Old Dutch Bridge in Kota was only recently 'renovated', but all its paint is peeling off. It spans a filthy canal – once a showcase of Batavia – that stinks of urine. Groups of men aimlessly hang around, spitting and throwing garbage around the place, all of them smoking. The pavement on the banks is broken and uneven, not fit for walking on, although it is only a year since it was laid. Bare-footed miserable children are all around. Decay is everywhere. Kitsch hotels stand next to nearly collapsing colonial mansions. On some buildings, the roofs are missing. Walls are missing too, and in many cases there are no interiors and no floors, and trees growing inside the shells. Some of the most stunning structures in Southeast Asia have turned to skeletons and are now beyond repair.

It took several years to build a tiny underpass to the old Kota train station. This would have been the only underpass in the entire capital city, which has around 12 million inhabitants. But the construction failed. The underpass was never integrated with the station, and the quality is appalling.

The city government now claims it is to build the first line of a metro system, but many people have no illusions. A country that cannot even construct an underpass or put two bricks of the sidewalk together decently and neatly will hardly manage to build a complex metro line. Even ITB (Bandung Institute of Technology) professor Djoko Sujarto (from the School of Architecture, Planning and Policy Development), has expressed scepticism whether the project can be completed.[35]

Warungs (a type of small family-owned business — often a shop or café) on the once majestic central square, Taman Fatahillah, have been turned into makeshift markets. Filth and garbage are seen everywhere and aggressive pop music blares at high volume from speakers. Scooters ride illegally through these few pedestrianized areas of the city, in total disregard for the pedestrians, who are unceremoniously pushed into the roadway.

Beggars are everywhere. This part of the city that was supposed to 'attract domestic and foreign visitors' now looks much worse than even the poorest African historic cities: Dakar, Zanzibar and Mombasa. To compare it with the great cities of Asia – Penang, Kuching, Manila (particularly the World Heritage site Intramuros) or Hanoi – is thoroughly pointless; they are universes apart.

Here, all imaginable and untreated diseases are on display. You can see cataracts, split lips, horrific burns, and exposed tumours, even leprosy. Visitors who are not part of the Indonesian majority population – blacks, Caucasians, Papuans and Chinese – will find racist insults poisoning the air. And as elsewhere in Indonesia, posters of a man who is alarmingly popular in Java – Adolf Hitler – are on sale right next to ones depicting the 'father of the nation', Sukarno.

For me, though, the dirt is the most shocking element of Jakarta, and is clearly scarring Kota. Even in this historic area, you see many dirty eateries, like those next to canals and at polluted sides of the roads, just as in other parts of the city. 'It is because there are no public places and when people are given some places to gather, they come here', explained Ms Yanti, a local resident. 'Because they are so poor, this is all they can afford. And being uneducated, they dump their trash and pollute.'

Kota seems to me a barometer for the state of Jakarta; it is

terrible but honest, unlike the prefabricated shopping centres with their chain stores and eateries for the rich. But when you leave it and drive to the area of malls around Hotel Indonesia, you inevitably pass through an even more horrific area: Glodok, formerly Jakarta's Chinatown, which has now been totally destroyed, and is nothing more than a mess of decaying, even collapsing structures.

The Chinese culture was rooted out, destroyed and banned. Glodok is where thinkers and artists of all races used to gather. It is also where people were murdered in 1965. And Chinese women were gang-raped by a racist mob here in 1998 (as also happened in Solo and so in many other places).

Many outsiders to Indonesia might wonder whether it is even possible to live in a city so awful, so charmless, and so brutal. But, for the majority of Indonesians, Jakarta is still a magnet: other cities such as Medan, Surabaya and Palembang – and the destitute *kampung* – are even worse than this.

While most of the international visitors to Jakarta leave in horror (not those who are paid to admire it, of course), the mass media continues to describe it as a sprawling and modern metropolis. There seems to be outright denial about the state of Indonesia and its capital. True, Jakarta is one of the best golfing destinations in Southeast Asia, but that is precisely because its public spaces have been cannibalized. Instead of building parks and playgrounds, the government has allowed luxury clubs to be built for the elite.

One turn from the main streets, and the real Jakarta exposes its wounds: filthy narrow alleys, channels clogged with garbage, makeshift stores selling unhygienic food, children running barefoot; thousands of big and small mosques, but not one decent playground for children. Garbage accumulates at every corner and polluted air penetrates the throat and eyes. Little girls are offering themselves for a pittance, while boys are sniffing glue from plastic bags.

The city may also be the most inward-looking of all the capitals of Southeast Asia. A quick look at the listings in the local press makes it obvious that this enormous city has close to no cultural activities. The new smallish theatre at the TIM[36] centre (which is ironically called the Big Theatre – Teater Besar; the Teater Kecil, or Small Theatre, is even tinier) mostly serves as a hangout for local thugs or as a place to have a quiet smoke. It is a commercial building, like almost every other building in the city. It receives no subsidies for hosting cultural events, and as a result, no theatre company can afford to perform there. Jakarta is artistically separated from the rest

of the world, except for the rare events arranged by foreign cultural institutes. There is no perception about what is being staged in the great intellectual capitals like Buenos Aires, Cape Town, New York, Tokyo, Beijing and London. No major travelling exhibitions visit the Indonesian capital, and no renowned orchestra passes farther south than Kuala Lumpur or Singapore. The only annual venue where people of Jakarta could see good foreign films – during the JIFFEST (Jakarta International Film Festival) – recently collapsed because of a lack of funding, despite the fact that the cinemas during that event were packed to the eaves. The elites have no taste and common people have no money, while the government is too busy stuffing its pockets.

Anton Himawan, an architect, said to me:

> There is no good intention from the local government to make the city beautiful and liveable. They don't hire capable and professional people and instead they corrupt everything, chasing the money. And the people don't care any more. They are too busy with their own things, with surviving.[37]

Srisetiowati Seiful, executive director of the Surya Institute, put it this way:

> We still have the culture of 'money can buy everything'. For example, a businessman or an official who wants to build a mall at a location that is considered heritage would make an usually successful effort to 'buy' officials who make it possible to change the urban planning and zoning rules.[38]

And so it goes. The market, allowed to act as it pleases, destroys everything, even its own base and the seat of government. Jakarta first ravished the rest of the archipelago, then turned against itself and began devouring its own body. The cannibalistic orgy continues, and it is an appalling, terrible sight.

LIVING IN JAKARTA

How do people in Jakarta manage to survive? Let us look at the middle-class budget, which as noted above, is typically around US$60 per person per month.

An average-sized household in Jakarta could easily consume $100 worth of electricity a month, and if the people here really lived by

international middle-class standards, they would not ruin their eyes in semi-darkness in order to save on the cost of lighting, as most of them do. Add water and cable television, medical insurance and car insurance, and this accounts for the entire income of the lower bracket of the *upper* middle class. This would still mean living in a terrible neighbourhood, breathing some of the worst air in the world, and sitting for hours each day in traffic jams. Add food, fuel, a new or used car every few years (families must have a car, although it costs double the same model in the United States), and occasional clothes, and I calculate that people need at least US$1,000 per person per month to survive with some dignity in the commercialized wilderness of Jakarta. That is a minimum; US$1,500 would be more realistic to cover all normal living costs, and we are not talking about extravagance here.

I cannot understand how the World Bank and the Indonesian government can suggest that people can pursue a middle-class lifestyle on US$60 a month. That would not even cover their electricity bill or their medical insurance. So what happens to sick people from the 'Indonesian middle class' – those at the lower end, who are still regarded as middle class by these organizations – if they get sick? 'They die,' said a doctor from Cipto Mangunkusomo Hospital in Central Jakarta. 'A really bad death,' he clarified.[39]

In spite of the pressure on income, even the middle class have maids, because very often, they simply have to. The city is so polluted and so filthy that in many neighbourhoods unless the houses are cleaned several times a day, they become health hazards. If both members of a couple work, they have little choice but to hire help. This, of course, is a different situation from the dozens of maids employed by rich households. Rich Indonesian couples seem unable to do anything for themselves. Cooking, gardening, caring for children, cleaning, washing, driving – all is done by the staff. A pathetic sight is only too common in the city's malls – a couple slowly and proudly strolling through the marble, steel and glass structure, while maids drag their children and shopping bags along behind.

Social life in Jakarta has collapsed. There are hardly any friendships left. Because of the transport problems, the city has become effectively divided and fragmented. Mobile phones are often the only mode of communication.

I used to criticize, even ridicule, the people of Jakarta for their obsession with mobile phones. I even used to write sarcastic articles on the topic. Then, not long ago, I finally understood that a phone

is all that some people in Jakarta have. It is the only way to connect with friends and relatives, the only way to flirt and have relationships, the only way to follow news. Most friendships are formed in the office, or they become virtual – conducted entirely electronically. Rendezvous are becoming impossible to arrange unless both people live in the same gated community. Driving from one place to another within the city could take two hours each way. It is rare now for people to meet up in large groups. There are almost no social gatherings unless someone dies or gets married. People rarely go to see films (and there are almost no good films showing anyway). There are no neighbourhood cultural centres or parks, while almost all cafés are in the malls. Is it intentional? It certainly seems so to me. I believe it is a conscious policy to ensure that people are divided and atomized.

Jakarta has been described as running on the 'Houston concept' – based on private cars, no public transportation, segregated neighbourhoods, elevated roads and malls. But if Jakarta is 'like' Houston, it is four times bigger and about 40 times poorer. It lacks the world-class opera, great museums (what little Jakarta has was built by the Dutch), the public areas and good nearby public beaches.

And although it is much poorer, it is also more expensive, for goods and services (housing, food, cars and clothes) of comparable quality actually cost more in Jakarta. Housing in Jakarta is not of comparable quality, however; much of it – what they call condos in Jakarta – consists of badly put-together towers made of concrete blocks not unlike those used in the Soviet Union for almost free public housing.

Take a walk in Jakarta, or anywhere in Indonesia, and you soon realize that not 10 per cent, not 50 per cent, and not even 60 per cent of the population, but the great majority are miserably poor. Then you realize: Jakarta is not a city. It is the toxic, hopeless, destitute Capital Slum of Indonesia.

4

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

When Pak Musrikan passed away on March 30, 2011 in his house in the city of Bandung, only his youngest daughter was there to close his eyes. But within a few hours, hundreds of relatives – members of his close and extended family – filled the living room, expressing grief and praying for the deceased. Men and women kept arriving for hours, most of them elderly, some crying, others solemnly pointing their eyes towards the grey face of a man who had departed this life at the age of 82 and was old enough to remember Dutch colonialism, the Japanese invasion, British slaughter in Surabaya as well as the struggle for independence.

There were tears, and the next day, during the funeral, there were speeches. As is the norm in the Javanese tradition, those who spoke at the funeral were only offering comfort, avoiding the most controversial (and arguably the most important) parts of Pak Musrikan's life. The main subject that went unmentioned was that for 14 years he had been imprisoned in the concentration camp on Buru Island.

Born and raised in rural East Java, Pak Musrikan's talent and determination earned him a grant to study in Perth in Australia. He became one of the first professors of the English language in Indonesia. This was the Sukarno era, and his progressive education guaranteed that he saw and understood the world. He travelled from Papua to India, helping to build his young nation.

But General Suharto considered education and knowledge as great dangers. After the coup in 1965 and the consequent genocide, Pak Musrikan was arrested and thrown into jail, then sent to Buru together with thousands of other Indonesian intellectuals. Some of his relatives were killed. His wife was, miraculously, allowed to continue teaching. His three daughters grew up with no knowledge of the whereabouts of their father. When one day he returned home, an internal family deal was reached – no discussions about the past were allowed, and no criticism of the system.

Following his return, Pak Musrikan was not allowed to work in the educational sector. He was not even allowed to vote. His left-wing beliefs were buried – he never spoke about his activist youth. Eventually, he became religious and died as a Haji and a very pious Muslim.

The earth at the cemetery covered his body, wrapped in a white sheet, and at the same time it covered something else: another testimony untold, another complex set of secrets. What happened after the arrest of this man, and what happened to him later in Buru? What was the agreement between him and his wife? What were his hopes and desires before 1965: for himself, for his family and for his country? We will never be able to find out. Indonesia will never be able to find out.

Millions of those who suffered are now taking their grief to the grave. The great hope of the regime is materializing: in 10, or at most in 20, years there will be no one left with memories of the horrors that turned Indonesia from a progressive nation to a fascist state. People are vanishing in silence, but fascism is surviving and even flourishing.

THE DEMOCRACY OF GENERALS

SBY is the president who serves foreign interests.
Eva Kusuma Sundari,MP[1]

It is sometimes claimed that Indonesia has left its dictatorial-military legacy behind, but this is another claim that bears closer examination.

Before I started to research this book I had known for some time that Indonesia's current president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY), was married to a daughter of Sarwo Edhie Wibowo, a notorious special forces 'Red Beret' general, who loved to brag that he and his mates had killed 3 million people after 1965. I also knew that he was a loyal servant of General Suharto, and that one year after being trained at Fort Benning – the US facility that has produced leaders of death squads that have operated all over Latin America and the Caribbean – he was sent as a platoon commander to East Timor. That was 1976, one year after the occupation, and evidently the time when some of the most horrific atrocities were taking place. But I did not know everything, and it took several encounters with Indonesian historians, activists and progressive politicians before I realized the full extent of SBY's involvement in shaping Indonesia and its near environs.

'SBY was also commander of a platoon in East Java', explained historian Hilmar Farid:

He was also a staff of the military command at Baucau District

> in East Timor. There, in 1980s, he was appointed Commander of 744 Battalion in Dili, which was really notorious. The Truth and Reconciliation inquiry discovered that 744 Battalion was responsible for hundreds of deaths and for torture. The president of this country acted for one entire year as the commander of this battalion. Years later, in February 2011, he travelled to Kupang in West Timor. And from there he went to Atambua – to the city where the battalion was moved. He travelled there, chatted with commanders, made big speeches.[2]

Members of the military hold important civil positions everywhere in Indonesia: not only at the highest levels, but also provincial and municipal posts. Senior military officials typically demand that entire streets be closed when they pass through cities and villages. They drive with sirens blaring and lights flashing, forcing ordinary people to pull over to the ditch. While staying at Westin Hotel in Bali in 2011, I witnessed how regular paying guests were forced to wait at the gate while the top brass of the Indonesian army invaded the resort in a tremendous convoy, for one of their countless meetings. The military could still do anything it wanted, because it still ruled.

In *The Democratic Struggle and the Fight for Socialism*, Zely Ariane wrote:

> Hersri Setiawan, a poet and activist from the People's Cultural Institute (Lekra), now a banned organization formerly affiliated with the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), commented that 'reformasi' 1998 was a massive wave that brought down the Suharto-military regime but did not follow through and failed to overthrow militarism, because 'ism' is a cultural concept. Setiawan's statement is correct in the sense that militarism is still a bugbear for this country. The addition of new military territorial commands, the involvement of the military in land conflicts and the shooting of farmers, the involvement of high-ranking military officers in the formation of many political parties, the discourse about political leaders with a military background being better then civilians and the narrow discussion of nationalism in the debate about territorial boarders, reflect this militaristic behavior and thinking.[3]

The elections for the governor of Jakarta in 2007 serve as a good example. The outgoing Governor Sutiyoso was a retired senior army

commander, a lieutenant-general who had served for three decades and was involved in the occupation of East Timor. It was alleged at the inquest into the deaths of five foreign journalists on Balibo in 1975 that Sutiyoso was a member of 'Team Susi' – one of the units involved in the savage advance, which also, of course, killed many Indonesians.

Sutiyoso's successor as Jakarta's governor, Fauzi Bowo, chose as his deputy retired Major-General Prijanto. Here is a part of the biography of Prijanto that was published by the *Jakarta Post* (as it appears on the paper's website, unedited, with all the errors, and without even a hint of irony):

> Maj. Gen. (ret) Prijanto is a long time Army officer who started his career at air defense infantry division of the Army's Strategic Reserves Command in 1976. He served in the division for eleven years before being promoted as the governor of the Army's Military Academy in Magelang in 1987. His field expertise was tested when he was deployed to East Timor (now Republic of Timor Leste) as chief squad of air defense infantry at Operasi Seroja (Lotus Operation) to East Timor in 1978. The operation which last from 1975 to 1979 is aimed to curb efforts from Fretilin, a movement from a group of indigenous Timorese who wants separation from Indonesia. Aside from the operation, Prijanto spent most of his career as an off-field officer. He spent most of his career over the last decade at the Jakarta Military in various divisions, mostly at the defense infantry division, which he knows best. Known as a diligent officer who always complies to his chief's command, he was appointed in 1995 as head of a team of private assistant of Let. Gen. (ret) AM Hendropriyono who serves as a commander at that time. Prijanto also had served as coordinator of private assistant of Gen. (ret) Wiranto when he was the Indonesia Military Chief in 1998 before returning to the Jakarta Military Command as a regional military commander a year after that.[4]

It is worth remembering that some of the worst atrocities in East Timor took place during the time when Wiranto was in charge. The Lotus Operation (Operasi Seroja), in which Prijanto actively participated, began on December 7, 1975. With US approval, Indonesian forces launched a massive air and sea invasion, using almost entirely US-supplied weapons and equipment. By mid-February 1976, around 60,000 men, women and children from tiny East Timor were dead. The United Nations has never accepted Indonesia's occupation and colonization of East Timor.

The story does not end here, because Bowo's opponent in the gubernatorial election was no civilian either. Adang Daradjatun had served as the former deputy national police chief. (In the past Indonesia's police and army were both part of the same organization, known as TNI. The police only became independent from the military in 2000.) The *Jakarta Post* again provides useful background:

> Adang Daradjatun's ambition since childhood was to join the police or military …. After Adang graduated from high school, his father wanted him to apply to Bandung's Padjadjaran University or the Bandung Institute of Technology. But Adang insisted on becoming a police officer. He told his father he was impressed by the discipline of police officers. Eventually his father relented and Adang was accepted at Akabri in 1968, graduating in 1971.[5]

So there was no major civilian candidate in this election, only a choice between men who had backgrounds in the military during, or shortly after, the time when it was responsible for mass murders.

General Wiranto himself ran for the presidency of Indonesia (against SBY) in 2009. By all accounts the leader of the HANURA political party was one of the worst perpetrators of human rights violations during the occupation of East Timor. On May 11, 2004 the *New York Times* reported:

> A United Nations-backed tribunal in East Timor issued an arrest warrant for General Wiranto, the former chief of the Indonesian military and a candidate for the nation's first direct presidential elections in July. He was charged by the tribunal in February 2003 with crimes against humanity in connection with violence after the former province's vote for independence in 1999. Indonesia has refused to accept jurisdiction of the East Timor court.

The *Economist* went as far as to refer to Wiranto in a 2011 article on corruption in Indonesia:

> In 2000 General Wiranto refused to resign his post as security minister despite accusations that he was responsible for war crimes committed in East Timor the year before, when he had been commander of the armed forces.[6]

Wiranto was not alone. Some close allies of President Yudhoyono were also responsible for the genocide in East Timor, Papua and elsewhere.

Some individuals are so tainted that the US administration refuses to issue them with entry visas. Periodically information surfaces, although most of it is concealed from the public and the media.

For example, on March 12, 2011 the *Sydney Morning Tribune* published a story by Philip Dorling, 'US denied visa to Yudhoyono aide over alleged crimes', in which he claimed that 'The US has blackballed one of the closest advisers to the Indonesian President, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, for alleged involvement in East Timor war crimes.' He had obtained the information through the leaked US diplomatic cables:

> Washington kept secret the reasons for denying a visa to the former Indonesian army general Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin, and Dr Yudhoyono subsequently appointed his friend as deputy defense minister.
>
> In September 2009, the US government withheld the issue of a visa that would allow Sjamsoeddin, a former army general then serving as a senior presidential adviser, to accompany Dr Yudhoyono who was about to attend the G20 leaders summit in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Mr Sjamsoeddin was subject to a US Department of Homeland Security recommendation that he be denied entry owing to suspected involvement in 'terror activities' and 'extrajudicial killing'.
>
> Mr Sjamsoeddin was accused of several gross human rights violations and extra-judicial killings.
>
> … While serving as an Indonesian Special Forces commander in East Timor, he was responsible for directing the Santa Cruz massacre that claimed the lives of more than 250 Timorese pro-independence demonstrators on November 12, 1991. It was further alleged that he was responsible for widespread violence committed by Indonesian troops in Dili in the aftermath of East Timor's August 30, 1999.

The president clearly felt these allegations did not disqualify Sjamsoeddin from becoming one of his top advisors. It is extremely rare for such a well-documented story to be published, but arguably much less rare for such men to hold positions of power.

HOW MUCH DOES THEIR VOTE REALLY MATTER?

How democratic is Indonesian society? It is true that elections are held, but are they free and fair? The Western media and academia

tend to focus on Jakarta and Bali, but the great majority of the Indonesian people live in the countryside and in small cities and towns. There, money speaks, and the fear, even horror, of going against local rulers is deep-rooted.

Outside certain social groups of city dwellers, elections have rarely anything to do with the free choice of the people. Most of the information that rural and poor voters receive comes from television stations, and in Indonesia the media are heavily commercialized, offering next to nothing in terms of educational programmes and quality information. Discussing the issue with villagers and city dwellers on Java, Sumatra, Lombok and other islands, I was told that in many cases, voters choose their favourites on the basis of their appearance. The situation gets much more sinister than that, however: village chiefs take bribes from political parties, and then tell their people how to vote. Sometimes political parties bribe voters directly, offering cash, consumer goods and other favours. Women are often told whom to vote for by their husbands or other male relatives. Irregularities at the ballot boxes are extremely common, but there is no mechanism in place to investigate them properly.

Observing and studying the political process in Java, Sumatra and Kalimantan, and also at almost all the geographical extremes of the archipelago, I came to the conclusion that at the time when this book was going to print, Indonesia had no organized political force capable and willing to defend effectively the interests of the impoverished majority of its citizens. While the number of political parties is impressive, virtually all of them represent specific business or political interests, or both.

'About local elections: I personally choose my own candidates, but I see that for many villagers money is what rules,' said Mr Muchidin – a Madurese migrant to Sidoarjo in East Java – as he disembarked from the ferry connecting the island of Madura and the city of Surabaya. 'Whichever party or candidate gives more money, wins.'

On August 10, 2008, I interviewed a spontaneously formed group of villagers in the cultural heartland of Java – in the village of Plaosan, only 2 kilometres from the magnificent temple of Prambanan, a World Heritage site listed by UNESCO. Three men and three women expressed in unison the view that they did not benefit at all from the multi-party elections in Indonesia:

> Elections do not have any positive impact on us .... We usually don't even come to campaigns organized by political parties ....

> Most of us do not trust politicians and there are many empty (spoiled) ballots during the *pilkada* (elections of local governor or mayor). It will not be any different during the upcoming elections, next year …. We don't understand the programmes presented by political parties and often there doesn't seem to be any programme at all – just some loud popular music and some promises that our life will get better …. We don't know the differences between the various competing political parties …. Women mainly vote based on looks – from the photos of the candidates.

Leading anthropologist Andrew Beatty, who has spent many years in various areas of Indonesia, made a working visit to the country in 2011 and afterwards described his thoughts on democracy in a letter to me:

> Violence and rule have always been closely entangled in Java, with rulers making use of thugs and the underworld to do their dirty work, act as enforcers and provocateurs. It was the same throughout the Dutch era and afterwards. People largely accept that their rulers are liars and cheats, while recognizing that some are worse than others. (In village elections, you choose the one who has bribed you or whom you think will be less extractive). While back in Indonesia this time, I never met anyone with any illusions about the new Indonesian democracy. People strike me as totally cynical.

The problem is that news and analyses from the countryside are almost never covered in the reports of international press agencies (unless there is a natural disaster) or in the pages of major newspapers. The majority of the Indonesian people receive no international press coverage, and the coverage that there is of the country and its political system tends to be simplistic and propagandistic.

Ms Sukayem, formerly a farmer and now a maid in Jakarta, claimed that one of the main problems in the countryside is that the great majority of farm labourers do not have their own land, which makes them vulnerable and dependent. This vulnerability and financial dependency translates into how they vote:

> During the last presidential election, the local government office (the regent) gathered village chiefs and told them whom to vote for. Then village chiefs gathered male residents and told them whom to vote for, basically repeating what they were told by the

> government officers a few days earlier. Then the men instructed their wives and female relatives how they should vote. During President Suharto's time, it was much simpler. We all just voted for Golkar. The people in *kampung* did not have to be told whom to vote for, they knew they had to vote for Golkar. Now it is more complicated, but we still vote for those we are ordered to vote for.

Ryaas Rasyid, a former state minister of regional autonomy[7] (under the administrations of Abdurrahman Wahid and Megawati), also offered his comments:

> Distribution of money is still accompanying elections. No election process is free from handouts of money and goods. Poor people do not care about the quality of the leadership or the programmes; they have been living in misery for too long. To get money from the candidates is for them almost like some consolation prize. Some voters opt for handsome, beautiful or pious candidates, but even those would get nowhere without throwing money at people.

The same concept applies all over the archipelago. I heard similar stories in Sumatra, Lombok, Sumba, Sumbawa, Kalimantan, and all over Java.

AFTER SUHARTO STEPPED DOWN

For the Indonesian elites and for their backers in the West, it was essential to convince the world that after Suharto resigned there was a sharp departure from his dictatorial way of governing. Indonesia is now promoted as a democratic country, with a thriving civil society, well-established non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and democratic elections. It has even been described as 'the only democracy in Southeast Asia'.

In reality, the elites have solidified their grip on power; they have blurred the line between the victims and victimizers. The legal system is primitive, and is geared to protecting the elites. Education is at an appalling level, and old interpretations – historical, religious and economic – are still used in the classrooms. Many (although not all) NGOs rely on foreign funding, and their staffs are more interested in income and foreign trips than in implementing fundamental changes in the country. The gap between the rich and the

Photo 4.1 One of the churches that was burned down in religious riots on the island of Lombok in 2000

poor is growing; both urban and rural misery are increasing (while the number of super rich is shooting up as well). Natural resources are disappearing while the environment is being destroyed.

Meanwhile, most of the Indonesian people do not have any sense of their relative position in the world and in the region. The media, particularly television, tend to report success stories, and though it is apparent to a visitor who looks even a little way below the surface that conditions for many in the country are at African sub-Saharan levels, most people do not appreciate this and are not motivated to fight for change. There is little or no discussion on the topic that in my mind should be absolutely essential: how Suharto's *Orde Baru* (New Order) has mutated into what is sometimes called the *Orde Baru Baru* (New-New Order) or as Pramoedya Ananta Toer used to call it with spite, *Orbaba*.

During an accidental encounter at Komunitas Utan Kayu (a small cultural centre in East Jakarta), the owner of *Tempo* magazine, Gunawan Mohamad, attacked me for being too critical of the Indonesian system, shouting that 'Indonesia can actually teach the United States about democracy.' I fully agreed that the United States is far from democratic, but that does not alter the fact that Indonesia remains a feudal-fascist state and an US client, therefore hardly a credible teacher.

As a result, the elites are free to grab all that is left of the riches of Indonesia. A few more years and there will be nothing to steal. Then the 'democratic country and the biggest economy in Southeast Asia' could well collapse completely. It produces almost nothing, living from the plundering of the leftovers of its natural resources, while making sure to suppress any form of intellectualism and any serious debate on its future.

In her analysis, 'The democratic struggle and the fight for socialism', Zely Ariane produced several sound arguments, suggesting that original attempts to reform the country were not profound but were only on the surface:

> Freedom of information, direct elections, the multi-party system, regional autonomy, all of which were the results of *reformasi* movement, are now being turned into a 'scapegoat' by the status quo forces, as if they are the source of the country's problems, its inefficiencies.
>
> It is not the fault of *reformasi* if the current state of democracy is deteriorating. Nor does it mean that Suharto's New Order was better because the '*Reformasi* Order' appears more vulgar, obscene. *Reformasi* changed the rules of the game, creating space for the preconditions for a more advanced and essential democracy. On the other hand, it also provided a foundation for fundamental changes to the principles of institutional state.
>
> Nevertheless, this foundation has no meaning if there are no democratic or progressive political forces to utilize or cultivate it. It is like a runway that has no function except for aircraft to land on it. *Reformasi* also has limits in and of itself. *Reformasi* changed what was on the surface, not what was deep inside. It only replaced a leaky roof tile, not the roof frame. *Reformasi* has been unable to reform a system deeply rooted in the oppression of humans by other humans. *Reformasi* was unable to make capitalism and militarism serve humanity.
>
> … Just recently, activists' circles were shocked by an Indo Barometer survey that found 40.9 per cent of respondents believed that conditions under Suharto's New Order regime were better than now. Progressive social movement groups meanwhile have concluded that not only has *reformasi* failed to deliver prosperity to the ordinary people but that their lives are becoming steadily worse.[8]

Nothing like this is seen on the pages of European or North American periodicals.

The results of the general acceptance of the lies about Indonesia that have been spread by the propaganda system are devastating. Embargoes have been lifted; there is no criticism of the ongoing genocide in Papua; the links between politicians and business interests are barely covered in the international media. In reality, Indonesia is still the same state as it was during Suharto's administration. It tortures, rapes and brutalizes those who get in the way of its elites. The Asia Human Rights Commission (AHRC) based in Hong Kong, and several other human rights organizations, have provided detailed accounts of recent atrocities.

There are some powerful and important works that appear on the internet, but they have not had a significant influence on the general public either in Indonesia or abroad. For instance, on July 20, 2011, the East Timor and Indonesia Action Network (ETAN) published an appeal summarizing the complicity of the United States with the present Indonesian regime:

> As Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton traveled to Bali, the East Timor and Indonesia Action Network (ETAN) urged her to condition U.S. security assistance to Indonesia on real improvements in human rights by Indonesia government and genuine accountability for violations of human rights.
>
> 'The restoration of assistance to Indonesia's notorious Kopassus special forces announced a year ago should be reversed,' said John M. Miller, National Coordinator of ETAN. 'Kopassus training was meant to be the carrot to encourage respect for rights. There is no evidence it has done so. U.S. law bars cooperation with military and police units with such egregious human rights records. The U.S should set an example by following its own law.'[9]

Then, on the eve of Secretary Clinton's visit, ETAN issued the following statement:

> In her February 2009 visit to Indonesia, Secretary of State Clinton praised democratic reforms since the fall of the U.S.-backed Suharto, saying 'Indonesia has experienced a great transformation in the last 10 years.' While Indonesia has made progress since the dark days of Suharto, crimes against humanity and other violations of human rights continue. U.S. policy has largely focused on

narrow strategic and economic interests that have little to do with the well-being of the Indonesian people. Meanwhile, progress has stalled. Human rights remain under threat. The military continues to find ways to maintain its influence. The pleas of the victims of human rights crimes in Timor-Leste, Aceh, West Papua, and elsewhere in the archipelago are ignored. Senior figures responsible for the worst abuses prosper.

In recent years, the U.S. has provided substantial assistance to both the Indonesian military and police. This assistance is said to come with lessons on human rights. The human rights lessons are not being learned. People see the police as abusers, not protectors, and military impunity prevails. Indonesia's security forces are learning that [the] U.S. will assist them no matter how they behave.

Over the past year, horrific videos and other reports of torture, the burning of villages and other crimes offer graphic proof that the people of West Papua and elsewhere continue to suffer at the hands of military and police. Soldiers prosecuted for these and other incidents receive light sentences. Just this past week, four civilians, a woman and three children, were wounded when Indonesian troops shot into a hut in the Puncak Jaya area of Papua.

As many as 100 political prisoners remain jailed: prosecuted and jailed for the peaceful expression of opinion. In many regions, minority religious institutions are persecuted, often with the active or tacit assistance of local security officials. Vigilante groups, like the Islamic Defenders Front, seek to enforce their own extra-legal version of morality, again with the backing of officials. Journalists, human rights defenders and anti-corruption activists are threatened and occasionally killed. The organizers of the 2004 poisoning of Indonesia's most prominent human rights lawyer, Munir, remain free and seemingly above the law.

We urge the U.S. to condition its security assistance on an end to human rights violations and to impunity. The U.S. should heed the recommendation of Timor-Leste's Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste (CAVR), which urged nations to 'regulate military sales and cooperation with Indonesia more effectively and make such support totally conditional on progress towards full democratization, the subordination of the military to the rule of law and civilian government, and strict adherence with international human rights, including respect for the right of self-determination.' Indonesia does not yet meet this standard.

ETAN went on to urge the United States to help to establish an

international tribunal to judge those responsible for the atrocities during the occupation of Timor-Leste. It concluded its appeal:

> Finally, we urge Secretary Clinton to apologize to the peoples of Indonesia and Timor-Leste for U.S. support for the Suharto dictatorship. Her visit offers the U.S. a chance to decisively break with past U.S. support for torture, disappearances, rape, invasion and illegal occupation, extrajudicial murder environmental devastation. Clinton should offer condolences to Suharto's many victims throughout the archipelago and support the prosecution of those responsible.[10]

Of course, Clinton offered no condolences and no apologies to the victims. And the old US allies – the Indonesian elites, the military and Indonesian Islam – continue to be given both material and propaganda support for their stoic determination to prevent any socialist ideals from taking roots in the archipelago. From the viewpoint of narrow US interests, perhaps this is understandable. Any socialist, truly patriotic or simply pro-people movement would first have to attempt to interrupt the destructive role that the Western companies, governments and militaries have been playing in Indonesia, in order to save what is left of the country.

But there is no such powerful movement. Decades of brainwashing tactics imposed by the regime and religion are finally bearing fruit. The country is indifferent, apolitical, living in its own realm of religious rituals and cheap popular music. The young generation is bombarded by irrelevant rubbish and neutral knowledge.

'There is apathy among children, right from the start,' explained Grace Leksana, a psychologist. 'They don't care about important events or about their country. No discourse on nation building; on the principles this country was based on before 1965. No discussion; no debate is allowed …. Teachers are government officials, after all. A little "error" and they could be branded as communists.'[11]

GIVING IN TO THE ALMIGHTY

Indonesia is now firmly on an intolerant religious path, as I describe in detail in Chapter 9. The economic, moral and social problems faced by the country are now generally recognized as so gigantic that almost nobody expects them to be solved in the foreseeable future. Instead of fighting for a better society, most Indonesians find it easier to put themselves in the hands of the Almighty, sit back and

wait for better days in another life, doing the minimum necessary to somehow manage to get though this existence.

A 2008 survey conducted by the SETARA Institute for Democracy and Peace in Bekasi, Depok and Tangerang showed that 56 per cent of the young people in Greater Jakarta supported sharia-based laws.[12] (In sharp contrast, Western mass media tend to depict Indonesia as a country where the majority practise a moderate form of Islam.) These laws are now being implemented all over the country, especially in West Java. Unaccompanied women are banned from leaving their homes after sunset, and Muslim women are ordered to wear headscarves. This might be unconstitutional, but President Yudhoyono and his government are unwilling to confront the sizeable and well-organized religious groups that uphold such laws.

For broadly the same reasons, the House of Representative passed on 30 October 2008 Law No. 44 of 2008 on Pornography, which criminalizes the production of any sex-related materials deemed to violate public morality. Both providers and users of websites judged to be pornographic face up to three years in prison or a substantial fine.

In the face of so many severe social problems, it is difficult to see how this can have been seen as a priority, but resources were devoted to enforcing the new law, and soon afterwards there were show trials. Those accused included one of the most famous rock musicians in Indonesia, Ariel Peterpan (his real name is Nazriel Ilham but he is often called after his band, Peterpan), who was sentenced in January 2011 to more than three years in prison for taping himself having sexual intercourse with two girlfriends. (He had not intended to make the recordings public, but they were stolen and put online by his manager.)

Indonesia does have a problem with sex crimes, admittedly, but this is not it. It has one of the worst records of child trafficking in the world. Even its closest ally, the United States, has acknowledged this. 'Internal trafficking remains a significant problem in Indonesia with women and children exploited in domestic servitude, commercial sexual exploitation and small factories', according to a US State Department report on *Trafficking in Persons*, published in June 2009. The report also points out that traffickers sometimes act in cooperation with school officials. Although there are no exact data, it is understood that the country also has one of the worst records of child abandonment in the world.

What happened to the secularism of Sukarno, who was, in his way, as determined as Ataturk in Turkey to form an unshakeable

secular state? There is a growing sense of anarchy in Indonesia: it is becoming obvious that the country is not ruled by law but by the small group of elites who are tolerating many of the demands of the increasingly intolerant religious majority. Even mob justice goes unpunished, as will be shown later in the book.

Earlier in March 2008, the House also passed Law No. 11 of 2008 on Information and Electronic Transactions. The most dangerous aspect about this new law, however, is not the censoring of pornography. Its title makes this apparent, though it was not spelled out in debate or in the media; as is usual in Indonesia, people had to read between the lines to discover what was intended. Anyone judged to have disseminated false news or racial and religious hate messages on the internet faces up to six years in prison or a fine of up to 1 billion rupiah (approximately US$109,000). In short, the Act enables the state to control the flow of information and persecute almost any writer, film maker or journalist. 'False news' is a term so vague that in the Indonesian context, based on the country's tradition, it could be taken to be any news that is disliked by the regime.

It is most unlikely that this law which prohibits 'racial and religious hate messages' will be used to protect minorities from racial abuse and religious discrimination. Minorities – religious, racial or in sexual orientation – are almost never protected in Indonesia. It is much more probable that this will be interpreted as a ban on criticism of the main Islamic religion and of Javanese rule.

Again, the first signs of a crackdown were apparent almost immediately. According to Agence France Presse (AFP), screenings of the controversial 17-minute film *Fitna,* which is critical of Islam, were banned, and its maker, Dutch lawmaker Geert Wilders, was barred from entering Indonesia. Jakarta also blocked access to YouTube, MySpace and other websites showing clips of the film, and the communications minister wrote to YouTube and other web services asking them to remove it.[13]

'We apologize. We have for the time being blocked sites and blogs which carry *Fitnah*, at the request of the minister for communication and IT,' internet provider Speedy commented on its website. Speedy said it had stopped users from accessing eight different sites, including blogs that carried the film. Another provider, Radnet, told users it was 'temporarily closing access' to YouTube and MySpace.

Films showing Indonesian atrocities in East Timor and Papua were already banned, including a 2009 Australian feature film *Balibo*, which 'follows the story of the Balibo Five, a group of journalists who were captured and killed whilst reporting on activities just prior

to the Indonesian invasion of East Timor in 1975'.[14] Criticizing government officials directly, naming corrupt officials and tycoons (except those who have fallen from grace and been indicted by the government itself, as was the case with Nazaruddin), investigating human rights violations by the Indonesian military – all this is taboo. Now the government has a powerful new tool to isolate even further the Indonesian archipelago, and curb potential critics.

New books are being banned, while many of those that had been banned during Suharto's dictatorship still remain so. Just to give an example, on December 23, 2009 the attorney general banned five books: *Suara Gereja bagi Umat Tertindas Penderitaan Tetesan Darah dan Cucuran Air Mata Umat Tuhan di Papua Barat Harus Diakhiri* (The Voice of the Church for the Suffering of the Oppressed: The Spilling of Blood and Tears of God's People in Papua Must Be Ended) by Cocratez Sofyan Yoman, *Enam Jalan Menuju Tuhan* (Six Roads to God) by Darmawan, *Mengungkap Misteri Keberagaman Agama* (Explaining the Mysteries of Religious Diversity) by Syahrudin Ahmad, *Dalih Pembunuhan Massal: Gerakan 30 September dan Kudeta Soeharto* (Pretext for Mass Murder: The September 30 Movement and Suharto's Coup) by John Roosa, and *Lekra Tak Membakar Buku: Suara Senyap Lembar Kebudayaan Harian Rakjat 1950–1965* (Lekra Did Not Burn Books: The Silent Voice of the Cultural Pages of the *People's Daily*, 1950–65) by Rhoma Dwi Aria Yuliantri and Muhidin M. Dahlan.

At least formally, 16 books by Pramoedya Ananta Toer are still banned, and so are several books by Benedict Anderson, including *How Did the Generals Die?*

Exhausted by their deepening social problems, Indonesians seem to have no strength or zeal to protest. There were only a few sporadic sparks of resistance to the Act. A group of hackers took over an Indonesian government website for several hours to protest against the new ban, the Information Ministry said. According to AFP, 'The protesters posted a message on the Ministry of Information website challenging it to "prove that the law was not drafted to cover up the government's stupidity".'[15]

At the same time, the Indonesian court acquitted the late former president Suharto (posthumously) in a civil corruption case, while ordering his 'charitable foundation' to repay more than US$100 million to the state. The United Nations and World Bank (not the most extreme of organizations) claim that Suharto and his family actually stole tens of billions of dollars from the country.

Just a few days before the bill was passed, I drove through the

crowded and depressing streets of Jakarta. Howling sirens pushed me to the curb. Several escort vehicles and motorbikes drove by, protecting a brand new Porsche Cayenne 4WD occupied by a legislator, someone whose official salary suggests he should rather be saving up to buy a Honda Civic. A few feet away, street children were playing barefoot in the gutter, one of them showing clear signs of malnutrition.

While the government is fighting internet porn, tens of thousands of Indonesian women are forced by poverty and hopelessness into brothels in Surabaya, Batam and Jakarta. Women who are raped or get pregnant out of wedlock abandon their infants and children, some of whom are left in the garbage bins or on the street. Women are humiliated, tortured and raped in Indonesian prisons. Country girls go, or are sent by their families, as 'maids' into sexual slavery in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the Middle East. As they leave Indonesia, they wear headscarves, so the state need not worry about their modesty.

In the last elections, one of the most outspoken critics of the anti-pornography law and the government's inaction in the face of the unconstitutional introduction of sharia law, Fadjroel Rachman, tried to run as an independent presidential candidate. The Constitutional Court rejected his candidacy, upholding the rule that a presidential candidate must be from a party or coalition of parties that won at least 20 per cent of the votes in the previous election. This effectively disqualifies anyone not deeply rooted in the system; in other words, it eliminates any serious opposition to the regime.

Rachman shared his thoughts with me: 'The fight for democracy and democratic Islam has deep roots in Indonesian society, but it has nothing to do with the present administration,' he said, zeroing in on a specific piece of legislation to secure women's rights that the government failed to back. 'Right now Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono is not willing to even issue a government decree introducing affirmative action for women in parliament, a plan that would set aside 30 per cent of seats in the parliament for women. The hard work of all those who fought for this has gone to waste.'[16]

HOW INFORMATION IS MANIPULATED VIA THE MEDIA

'There is a limit to what can be written about the military, for instance,' explained the senior editor of one of the major magazines in Indonesia (he asked not to be identified). 'And the same goes for the police. If we cross the line, we are risking our life and our magazine could be ruined.'

'Most of the people get their news from television,' said

an Indonesian television reporter, who also preferred to remain anonymous:

> While magazines can at least offer some criticism, television stations are much more limited. They can't be openly critical of the government, military and the police. The great majority of the Indonesian public never encounters direct criticism of the government's handling of the disasters like the one that devastated Aceh in December 2004. People simply don't know. And, honestly, they don't care!

'How could we write, if we were not taught about genocides at all?' asked Ms Ayu, a student of journalism in the city of Bandung. 'Lecturers teach almost nothing about Timor-Leste and Papua. They did not teach us about the killings of Chinese in 1965. Anyway, our lecturers are in their early 40s; they are products of the New Order of Suharto.'

Journalism is a business, one more way to gain a prestigious job or maybe even fat bribes. It has nothing to do with telling the truth or improving society. Ayu added:

> Only a few of the students have ideals, and desire to bring honest information to the public. Most of the students study only to get a job later. Even when students have ideals during their studies, once they join the media, most of them have to leave behind their ideals and obey the editors and the media policy there. If we ask the editors directly, they always say that there is no pressure and no intervention from the owners when it comes to editorial policy, but that is not true. They do have to obey most of the time.
>
> I also learned that there are individuals and organizations who willingly give money to journalists, and usually journalists do not refuse. In Palembang, if someone wants to give a press conference, he prepares the budget for paying the journalists in advance.

The Indonesian media is very well versed in self-censorship. Of course, almost no insider – local or foreign – would admit it. There are many practical examples of how even critical articles and reports are trimmed to fit the general self-congratulatory lines. Let me quote a couple of them.

On July 29, 2011 the *Jakarta Globe* carried a brave report by A. Lin Neumann entitled 'Cikeusik – a criminal verdict'. This well-

written article exposed the horrors of an Indonesian group of radical Islamists calling themselves 'Justice' who had murdered three people from a minority Muslim sect. The murderers received only a few months in jail. Neumann came to some conclusions that struck me as both correct and brave: for instance, 'The lesson to the people is that such attacks are understandable; the victims learn that they are without rights.' He followed this with other strong accusations against religious intolerance. But then came comments that were clearly intended to dilute the criticism, such as 'Of course, I do not mean to suggest that the government interferes in individual court cases, but rather that it has a duty to uphold tolerance and speak up for the rule of law.'

Of course, the government does interfere in almost all landmark individual court cases. That is surely known to Mr Neumann, just as it is known to all those who practise law in the country. But it would have been going too far to criticize the direction of the entire country, rather than just one unfortunate incident. Qualifications such as this have a tremendous influence in shaping the psyche of Indonesians and foreigners residing in this country.

Neumann's qualifications get worse towards the end of his piece:

> Last week I was in Tokyo, one of Asia's most sophisticated cities, and an elegant woman running a gift shop asked me where I lived. 'Indonesia!' she repeated with approval. 'That country is very good. Japan is going down.' Imagine hearing that a decade ago. The impression that Indonesia is a major success story is increasingly widespread. But don't take it for granted. Mob rule, disrespect for the law and courts that treat killers with kid gloves are also still part of Indonesia's story.

This is what the media and state propaganda constantly repeat to the people – the 'success story of Indonesia', and the way it is 'respected and admired' by the rest of the world.

Desi Anwar, a senior anchor at Metro TV, wrote an article from which this quote comes:

> While I'm the first to admit that living in Jakarta is far from being paradise on earth, my jaw practically dropped when I read that Jakarta came 39th out of 49 cities in a survey by a London-based consultancy that ranks Asia's best locations for expatriates. Singapore, according to the survey, is first.[17]

So far so good, but then come the injured pride and personal attacks on the entire expat community, which dares to rate the capital city of Indonesia so low (although not so very low, in this particular survey. Other surveys have placed Jakarta squarely at the bottom of the list of major cities in the Asia-Pacific, even below Rangoon). Anwar's carps at the expats are patronizing, insulting and petty (as several responses to the article suggested), but such comments go down very well with the Indonesian ruling elites:

> But compared to the simple life at home in which they must drive themselves or catch the train to the office, deal with the daily chores of shopping, cleaning, washing, taking the rubbish out, dropping the children off at school, etc., I suppose an expat's life in Jakarta is quite challenging. The number one challenge being having to live up to the image and status of an expat itself, which if you happen to be a Westerner, equals being rich with lots of money to spend, a penchant for a good time and a keen interest in the local culture — and which incidentally makes you attractive and popular with the local girls or boys.

All this has nothing logically to do with the survey's points about the poor quality of life in Jakarta (even for rich expats), but it manages to hint that expats are a bunch of paedophiles, hypocrites and show-offs, and so discredit the criticism. This gives a sense of how the 'logic' of the Indonesian media works, and how the manipulation process functions.

According to Hendardi:

> The media has been oppressed for decades. For example, the *Tempo* magazine was banned. News from abroad was blacked out. The government then created corporatist organizations for journalists like PWI – the Indonesian Journalists Association. The room for media has been more open, but after over three decades of oppression, our society became the society of silence. It is not easy to change that.[18]

There is no culture of investigative reporting, no capacity to produce lengthy and in-depth analytical pieces. There is no intellectual courage. And there is no desire to go beyond the personal interests of the owners and chief editors.

Linda Christanty, one of the most outspoken writers and journalists in Indonesia, has no illusions about the state of the media:

> Generally, the Indonesian media likes to report 'human stories'. But there are no taking sides, no defending the people. The loyalty of the journalists here is not to the people.
>
> Even if there were some elements of what they call in the West 'good journalism', they would be difficult to implement here. There are reasons for that: for instance the owners of media outlets are always worried that if some cases would get reported, it would expose the crimes of their friends – officials and businesspeople.
>
> Many media outlets choose to play it safe. Such as *Kompas*,[19] which follows the principle of 'crab journalism'. I have no idea from where they got this expression, but the owner of *Kompas*, Jacob Oetama, said that 'crab journalism' is reporting that follows a crab's behavior – go forward when there is no danger and retreat to the hole when there is a threat. Surya Paloh, owner of Media Indonesia and Metro TV, uses his media as a tool for his political campaign. Despite what people expected, Tempo Group is also far from being independent media.
>
> In some cases there is political content, but it is not there for the sake of the people. Media bosses only care about increased circulation and money that comes from advertisements.[20]

The world according to the Indonesian media is very simple. Even as the Occupy Wall Street protest went global and people worldwide were expressing their disgust with the excesses of the free market economy; even as alternative systems in Venezuela, Bolivia, China, Vietnam, Brazil and elsewhere were capturing the imagination of people all over the developing world, the Indonesian media remained obsessed with market indicators. It bombards its readership with reports on top-end housing and the fashion trends of the elites. It is as if the media have been given an order to promote Indonesia as a 'normal country'.

Professor Isna Wijayani from University Baturaja thinks there is no Indonesian media that exists for the sake of the people:

> Most of the media reports on the situation, on the conditions of the people, but not on their plight and the reasons behind the situation.
>
> For instance, local journalists here in Sumatra are facing limitations of funds and as a result they can't embark on a thorough investigation or follow the story outside of their city. I think that keeping them underfunded is one of the ways to limit their

> involvement in big cases such as illegal logging that is prominent here in Sumatra.
>
> Another issue is corruption. There are still quite a number of journalists who accept money from sources, simply because they feel that their salaries are too low and they have to live.[21]

Even so, many Indonesian individuals and organizations who are fully disillusioned with the post-Suharto era seem to want to believe that at least in the field of media there has been some positive progress.

Pramoedya Ananta Toer was no fan of Indonesia journalists, who in turn considered him arrogant. He often lamented that 'I really can't work with them. They have no knowledge; they make mistakes, misquote others and me. They ask the same questions over and over again.'[22] But maybe the problem is much deeper. The local media does not see its role as trying to change society or inform the public about the appalling condition of the nation, comparing it with the rest of Asia and the world. It does not try to educate Indonesians about much better ways to run the economy, social system, judiciary or the entire country. The Indonesian media is one of the main upholders of the status quo. Journalism in Indonesia is not a passion, a calling – it is a job, a career, a business, even a way to enrichment through corruption.

THE LEGAL SYSTEM

> The law can be an elegant instrument … But in Indonesia, it's just a confused, corrupted, patchy mess with little predictability.
>
> Michael Backman, *The Age*, Australia

Those who believe that the Indonesian legal system is independent should think twice. Miscarriage of justice is rampant, with the outcomes of court cases regularly being influenced by political, religious or financial interests. The system is designed in such a way that there is almost no possibility that a rich individual will lose to a poor one, or that the regime will lose to an opposing individual or organization.

In Indonesia, almost nobody believes that the legal system is fit for purpose, but there seems to be very little that can be done to reform it. It is designed to protect the elites from the people, and the elites control the presidency, the government, the parliament and the judicial system itself. Those who are benefiting from the

system will not reform it, as personal gain seems to be all that matters in Indonesia. As with the other institutions of the state, the judicial system is unlikely to be reformed unless there is a complete overthrow of the existing state system.

According to the Judicial Mafia Eradication Task Force,[23] the judiciary and the police are the two institutions that give the most grievance to the Indonesian public.

'Organizations are having tremendous impact on Indonesia', explained Hendardi:

> Until now no other economic system and no legal system could be implemented here – only those that are supported by the US and IMF could be considered. It is important to understand that political interests are shaping the legal system. If the regime does not want the legal system to improve, it will not.[24]

Let me quote from a report on the visit of Professor Jeffrey Winters from Northwestern University, Illinois in April 2011 to Gadjah Mada University (UGM) in Yogyakarta, Central Java.

> Winters … assesses that Indonesia is a democratic state without law. The statement is based on his observation that after the fall of the Suharto regime, the democratic system in Indonesia has turned to the system of oligarchy. Consequently, laws which are expected to restrict and guard the government do not function at all.
>
> The effect of democracy without law is the criminal democracy. The law here actually submits to the authorities,' said Jeffrey in Public Discussion of Oligarchy and Corruption: Perspectives of Political-Economy and Law at the UGM Faculty of Law, Friday (15/4).[25]

In Indonesia, a 'big man' can use drugs almost openly in any Jakarta nightclub. There is little danger that he will be arrested, and even if he is, he could easily bribe his way out of trouble. But a 'small' person would most likely be executed or spend the rest of their life in prison for possessing just a small amount of marijuana or other illegal drugs.

As I wrote this chapter, the case was reported of a 14-year-old Australian kid who was sent to an Indonesian prison. He was vacationing in Bali with his parents when an elderly man approached him, saying he hadn't had a meal for days. The boy bought few grams of grass as a goodwill gesture.[26]

'Ordinary people say they don't even think of getting involved in the legal system. When somebody steals your motorcycle and you report it to the police, the cost will be higher than the cost of the motorcycle itself,' said Eva Kusuma Sundari, member of parliament. 'So among the politicians, if we get involved in a case and what is at stake is US$10,000, then the cost of the trial itself would be $100,000. The police and the prosecutors can play around with the cases, and they do. You leave it up to them and the case will never end.'[27]

The result is that affluent individuals and corporations can ride roughshod over the rights of other people. In December 2008, for instance, police officers and hired goons for the Arara Abadi Corporation (a paper and pulp company) attacked a peasant community in Riau province. Their aim was to gain control of the community's land, and they achieved it – in the process arresting 200 peasants, destroying 700 houses, and forcing 400 people to hide in the forest.[28] And this is not the worst case – people are being killed every month by thugs, by guards, by army and police guarding businesses.

The damage is not only to ordinary people; this problem affects the entire economy of Indonesia. Foreign companies often quote the inadequate legal framework as one of the main reasons for not investing in Indonesia.

A recently leaked communication between the US Embassy and the State Department in Washington indicated that when choosing between the interests of their client and reputation of the President of Indonesia (SBY), the lawyers had chosen the latter:

> The Indonesian lawyers argued that any victory in the court of public opinion would have been far outweighed by such a public loss of face for SBY.[29]

The case of Adiguna Sutowo

It was New Year's Eve 2005, and Adiguna Sutowo had been drinking heavily, allegedly mixing his alcohol with drugs (crystal meth), which is common on Jakarta's nightclub scene. He was boozing in the Fluid nightclub at the Hilton Hotel (which is now called the Sultan), then owned by his brother Ponco. At one point their waiter Rudi Natong, a 25-year-old law student, handed back to Sutowo's girlfriend Novia Herdiana a credit card, with an apology that it had been declined. The amount that was supposed to be charged was around US$20. Without any warning, Sutowo pulled out a gun and

shot Natong in the side of his head: point blank, execution style. He then wiped his gun and left.

On June 17, 2005, the *Sydney Morning Herald* commented:

> A businessman from one of Indonesia's wealthiest families has escaped with a seven-year jail sentence after murdering a waiter who told him the credit card he was using had been rejected.
>
> Adiguna Sutowo shed a few tears but appeared largely unmoved as judges in the Central Jakarta District Court read out the sentence to a room packed with some of more than 100 hired thugs he brought with him.
>
> Sutowo congratulated his legal team, led by Mohammad Assegaf, the same lawyer used by the former president Soeharto, who was a great friend of the killer's father, Ibnu Sutowo.
>
> In a country where heavy sentences are routinely handed out for small offences, and money can sometimes influence a verdict, the case has created huge interest.

I cite this case because it typifies the impunity enjoyed by the Indonesian elites. In his column in *The Age* in Australia, Michael Backman addressed the same case and argued that the Indonesian legal system ruins lives:

> Adiguna is the son of the late Ibnu Sutowo, who used the millions he stole while head of Indonesia's state-owned oil company to build a business empire.
>
> Prosecutors demanded life in prison, the maximum punishment for murder. Adiguna was also charged with illegal possession of a firearm for which the maximum sentence is death by firing squad.
>
> But in Indonesia it is unusual for the rich to be severely punished, because, to be frank, they bribe the presiding judges.
>
> My column attracted several interesting emails from readers connected either with Adiguna or the case.
>
> Of most interest was this: 'Unfortunately my brother was one of the idiots who should have testified against (Adiguna), and he had to leave the country so he would not be killed' …
>
> Well, on Thursday, the Central Jakarta District Court did sentence Adiguna. Not to life but to seven years. A 'mockery' of justice is how lawyers for the victim's family described it. And then some: the conditions of Adiguna's incarceration will be negotiated, to say the least.
>
> One of the more celebrated cases of a rich businessman going

> to jail in Indonesia was that of Eddie Tansil, who was convicted in 1994 for bribing state bank officials to obtain $US430 million in unsecured loans, loans on which he later defaulted. His jailing caused a sensation in Indonesia. Rarely do rich people suffer such an indignity. And when they do, it's often cosmetic. Several months into his jail term, Tansil was sighted in Bali playing a round of golf. It turned out that he routinely bribed jail warders to let him out for days at a time so that he could run his many businesses and even get away for the occasional weekend. But then, one May day in 1996 Eddie simply didn't come back. The warders took days to raise the alarm – they assumed he'd been delayed, presumably on a pressing business matter. That was the last that anyone ever heard of him.
>
> Seven years for killing a waiter; 15 years for killing a judge – it all makes Schapelle Corby's 20 years for importing four kilograms of marijuana look a trifle steep. Probably she received around eight years for the actual offence and the other 12 because Australia, and more precisely Australians, kicked up such a fuss about her case in the first place.[30]

Adiguna Sutowo was released on December 14, 2007. For this execution-style murder committed in public he spent two years in jail.

'People criticize the legal system, because it only serves the rich to prosecute and persecute the poor,'[31] said Haris Azhar, head (coordinator) of Kontras, arguably the most important independent human rights organization in Indonesia.

> And there are no strong perspectives for legal reforms. Sometimes, I even feel like asking: do we have any reforms at all? We have agendas set by Supreme Court, for instance. But not reforms, not really! There are too many people who take full advantage of the current legal system. That's why it is uncertain whether and how the reforms would take place.

Examples of the very different ways in which cases of religious violence are dealt with by the courts (depending on the backgrounds of the victims and the perpetrators) are given in Chapter 9.

PRISONS, TORTURE AND EXTRA-JUDICIAL KILLINGS

In Indonesia, people are being killed, tortured, intimidated and having their money extorted. This is done for their land, for money,

because they harbour a political opinion, they long for independence, they believe in something other than that believed by the majority, and even because they believe in social justice or in nothing at all.

The security forces (the army and police) always side with business interests – local and foreign – against the interests of the people. 'People are being shot and killed by local police,' explained Azhar. 'It happens often and everywhere; in Sulawesi, Papua, Kalimantan and Aceh. There are constant clashes between communities and companies. The government always supports the companies.'

To speak or write about this Indonesian reality in the West is not encouraged. 'NGOs that tackle human rights issues have been experiencing difficulties in getting funding from Western donors since 2005,' explained Hendardi. 'Traditional donors insist that Indonesian human rights issues have improved and they have moved funding to Africa. This is also one way to give legitimacy to the Indonesian regime.'[32] Azhar agreed, and so do several other heads of human rights organizations.

Those who end up behind bars are treated with great cruelty. Women are harassed and raped, men tortured. Money is extracted and families are blackmailed. Again, there is no protection against such behaviour.

Eva Kusuma Sundari told me this story:

> I have one farmer in my constituency who was sent to jail for six years. Not only was his life ruined; during the trial, he lost most of his possessions. Police came and took his mobile phone, then his cooling fans. They said it was for the sake of evidence. These things were not relevant at all. I visited him in jail and he told me that he must pay one man Rp400,000 per month (US$45) and others Rp50,000 per week (US$5.50). If he doesn't pay, he won't be able to meet his family and get food from outside, which in Indonesia means death.

'Since 1965, Indonesia has been a staunch US ally,' says Nursyahbani Katjasungkana, former member of the House of Representatives from the progressive Islamic National Awakening Party. 'And those who forged such an alliance in both countries now control the mass media, so the criticism of human rights in Indonesia very rarely makes headlines in Indonesia or in the West.'[33] Indonesian lobbies abroad and foreign advisers to the Indonesian government are also responsible for presenting a distorted image of the country.

Political killings and gross human rights violations take place

regularly throughout the Indonesian archipelago. However, the international press has only covered the most extreme cases, such as the murder of one of the most prominent Indonesian human rights and anti-corruption activists, Munir Said Thalib, in 2004, on board a Garuda Indonesia Airlines flight bound for Amsterdam via Singapore. A pilot for the state airline Garuda Indonesia, Pollycarpus Budihari Priyanto, who also doubled as an Indonesian intelligence officer, poisoned Mr Munir with arsenic, according to the findings by the Netherlands Forensic Institute.

After the assassination, I met Munir's wife Suciwati Munir, who had for months been receiving anonymous phone calls and threats aimed at forcing her to drop all inquiries into her husband's murder.

The conditions in Indonesian prisons are horrific, even by the standards of the Third World. Prisoners rely on food brought from outside. If the prisoner's family does not bribe the wardens, conditions can deteriorate even further. Prisoners are routinely tortured; children, women and transsexuals, and men too are routinely raped.

According to the *Jakarta Post*:

> 'There is a perception that people with prison sentences have minimal rights. Inside the prison centers, people who are weak tend to become victimized,' Putri said, referring to discrimination against women and child inmates.
>
> Child inmates, she said, are often threatened by sexual abuse while transsexuals often become the object of rape…
>
> Association for the Prevention of Torture Asia-Pacific program officer, Philippe Tremblay, said eradicating prison oppression will not happen overnight as it is also a matter of changing the culture of incarceration.[34]

Torture is widespread in Indonesia. It is applied in war zones and in the territories where the native population, dreaming of independence and self-determination, is intimidated and brutalized by Jakarta-sponsored migrants from ethnic and religious majorities. The most horrific torture is systematic and institutionalized rape, an issue that is addressed at length on page 105. The police are the main culprits but there are other institutions involved. The authorities often use thugs and criminal gangs to clear land or to intimidate citizens, when it is not practicable to use the police and other law-enforcing institutions for these purposes.

On November 23, 2007, the BBC reported in 'Torture "unpunished in Indonesia"' that:

> Indonesia has a 'culture of impunity' in the face of ill-treatment and torture, a senior UN official has said.
>
> Manfred Nowak, special rapporteur on torture, has spent two weeks inspecting the country's prisons and police and military detention centres.
>
> Mr Nowak said he found evidence of detainees being electrocuted, suffering systematic beatings and even being shot in the legs at close range.
>
> He called on the government to make torture a separate crime under the law.[35]

AHRC is monitoring human rights violations in Indonesia, including the widespread use of torture. Its conclusions about the likelihood of eliminating these vile practices in Indonesia are pessimistic:

> The practice of torture in Indonesia is already institutionalized. The practice of torture is deeply rooted because the police see it as a 'source of income', in a form of bribery when committing torture. Accordingly, this becomes an incentive to conduct torture for police officers with relatively low salaries. From the legal point of view, the perpetrator should have been punished. However, punishment of the perpetrators is difficult as the victims are reluctant to file complaints and refuse to voice their sufferings. This whole situation makes the struggle to eliminate torture even harder.
>
> From the Report of the UN Rapporteur on Torture in 2008, it is known that most violations of the Convention occur in the process of interrogation and detainment. It was held by the Report that the practice of torture in Indonesia is systemic. This is due to the fact that it is the policy of military and police to use torture as 'detention and special interrogation methods.' The method is proven to be used as a counter-insurgency manual prepared by the Indonesian army for its personnel in a dossier 'secret.' Even if by statistics most of the cases occur in the process of detention and/or interrogation, the law No. 8 Year 1981 concerning Indonesian Criminal Procedural Law does not incorporate the provision to protect a suspected person from torture if it is used as interrogation method or if it is conducted in the period of detention.

> The Committee Against Torture found through various practices of torture in Indonesia, such as that which happened in Aceh and Papua, that the members of Indonesian security forces and their auxiliaries committed, encouraged and condoned widespread and systematic torture and ill treatment of victims as a method of interrogation. In some cases of torture, the victims either died or suffered permanent injury. Considering the gravity of the event, the Committee Against Torture stipulated in their report that Indonesian Government should take more effective measure in dealing with torture issue.[36]

In October 2010, the world was outraged by footage recorded on a mobile phone, showing local men – allegedly those supporting independence from Indonesia – being tortured by armed forces in Papua. Donna Guest, Asia-Pacific deputy director for Amnesty International, spoke to CNN, and described the video as 'the latest reminder that torture and other ill-treatment in Indonesia often go unchecked and unpunished'.[37]

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

It is late afternoon and the eyes of former Indonesian MP Nursyahbani Katjasungkana are watering. She sits on the sofa in her living room, right in front of me, but it appears that her mind is wandering far away, somewhere in the past.

'Millions of women in Indonesia are genitally mutilated', she says slowly. 'For cultural and religious reasons.' Then she looks away:

> I was one of them. Sometimes I take a hand mirror and look there, to see what they have done to me, to see huge scars on my vagina. And my sister was genitally mutilated and I witnessed it. When they mutilated my sister – it was in 1960 – I was only 5 years old. They exposed my sister, and around her vagina it was all so soft, smooth and undeveloped, and then they took the scalpel and cut it all off. There was blood all around; blood and screams.
>
> And my daughter had to experience the same. My family forced me. And I didn't know … she was born in 1990 before I learned that genital mutilation is a human rights issue. I refused to put her through this, but they kept chasing me, pushing me: 'Why, why, why not? It is sin and shame on the entire family not to do it!' At the end, when she was six months old, I took her to the hospital in Jakarta where they did it to her …. I didn't see the act,

> because they took her away. I sat outside and cried and cried. I felt all my hair was standing up. And I heard my baby screaming and then they brought her back to me and there was blood everywhere.[38]

AFP reported on June 2011:

> Rights groups including Amnesty International … urged Indonesia to revoke a regulation, which they say legalizes female circumcision in the mainly Muslim country.
>
> Women's rights activists called on the government to withdraw a decree issued by the health ministry in November [2010] authorizing certain medical professionals to carry out the procedure on baby girls.
>
> 'We are very disappointed with the minister's decision. Circumcision is a form of abuse of women,' said Aditiana Dewi Eridani of the Islam and Women's Rights Information Centre.
>
> 'This is a backward step for women's rights protection in this country.'
>
> The practice is encouraged by some Islamic leaders and is common in the mainly Muslim country, especially in more conservative rural communities.
>
> Amnesty said the decree violated several Indonesian laws on human rights, child protection and discrimination against women.
>
> 'Female genital mutilation constitutes a form of violence against women which should be eradicated,' it said in a statement.
>
> It said the practice 'inflicts pain and suffering on women and girls, and hence violates the absolute prohibition of torture and ill-treatment'.
>
> 'Female genital mutilation also encourages discriminatory stereotypes about women's sexuality,' Amnesty added.[39]

Until now there has been legal ambiguity about the issue of female genital mutilation (FGM). Instead of simply banning it, the Indonesian government issued guidance that was interpreted by many doctors and nurses, hungry for extra income, as a green light to proceed with the practice. This allowed FGM to be performed regularly and on a large scale, although often without detailed records. There is insufficient data about the number of girls forced to undergo this practice, which is banned in most countries worldwide.

IRIN commented:

> 'This will give doctors a new motivation to circumcise [girls] because now they can say the Ministry of Health approves of this, and the Indonesian Ulamas' Council approves of it,' Jurnalis Uddin, doctor and lecturer at Yarsi University in Jakarta, told IRIN.
>
> Though FGM/C [cutting] was banned in 2006, two of Indonesia's Muslim organizations, including the largest and mostly moderate Nahdlatul Ulama, ultimately condone the practice, advising 'not to cut too much', and, as a result, many continue to perform the procedure …
>
> Uddin found Indonesia-wide FGM/C had not increased dramatically since the Suharto era; however in some areas, such as Bandung, West Java, there was an increasing tendency to perform it, even among moderate Muslims.
>
> Across Indonesia approximately 12 percent of female babies born in hospitals, birthing centres or assisted by government midwives have been circumcised, a figure that excludes FGM/C procedures done outside such facilities, Uddin said.[40]

'In our culture and according to the religion, women have to obey men,' said Ms Katjasungkana, who is now a lawyer and human rights activist:

> Even in our marriage law the man is described as the breadwinner. We are trying to change the laws, but there is resistance and things don't move fast.
>
> 'And it is not only inside the house where the women are being harassed. I saw even in the House of Representatives how their colleagues openly bullied female MPs. One of my fellow representatives – she was beautiful and single and she was a lawyer from Lampung – is being openly harassed by them. Their talk was like: 'Oh, I feel so sorry for her. I can't take her because I have already four wives.'

Rape

The regime and its allies have been using rape as a dreadful weapon of choice. It was applied to break and destroy women belonging to progressive organizations like Gerwani in 1965. It was also used

during the occupation of Timor-Leste, and it is widely used now in Papua.

Now mostly in their late 70s and 80s, several women from the Gerwani movement who survived imprisonment spoke at length about the mass rapes and sadistic torture sponsored by Suharto's New Order in Maj Wechselman's documentary film *The Women and the Generals*.

Women of Timor-Leste were subjected to rape on a daily basis and often on a massive scale. When I attempted to investigate in 1996 the allegations of rapes in the villages near Ermera, I was tracked down, arrested, subject to torture myself and my films were destroyed and most of them confiscated. Many women of East Timor were abducted and forced to serve the TNI as sexual slaves. As early as 1999, the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported:

> Dukai, now 39, says the only way she could survive was by cleaning the military barracks in return for food. But other soldiers took turns to sexually abuse and often rape her, and she now has five children by five different soldiers. 'My children are children of war,' she says. A newly released United Nations investigation says the Indonesian military has used violence and rape against women as a weapon of intimidation and torture in East Timor and other areas of conflict in Indonesia, including Irian Jaya and Aceh.
>
> The special rapporteur to the UN Human Rights Commission, Dr Radhika Coomaraswamy, also reported that ethnic-Chinese Indonesian women raped during last May's riots in Jakarta have been threatened to stop them telling their stories. None of 52 victims of sexual assault and rape who she interviewed had filed charges.
>
> Some of the victims were even sent photographs of their own rape, accompanied by a warning that the pictures would be widely distributed if the women dared speak up, Dr Coomaraswamy said in her report released to a UN human rights panel in Geneva.[41]

Most of the crimes were never investigated and no perpetrator of mass rapes is serving a prison term.

There is an enormous amount of evidence about the sexual brutality committed by the Indonesian forces, but with some exceptions, it has disappeared from the public consciousness, in the West as well as in Asia. Although several detailed reports were published, particularly in the Australian media, the political establishment of

the Western countries did its best to diminish their importance by constantly portraying Indonesia as a 'normal', 'democratic' and 'tolerant' nation.

Here is another Australian report:

> In September 1999, a young East Timorese woman was brought to a militia post in Gleno. In the days immediately after the independence ballot, she was at the mercy of men who had lost the fight to keep East Timor within Indonesia.
>
> A former militia gangster, Francisco Martins, told the independent Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation that he had seen the young woman in Gleno after she had been abused so violently she could hardly walk.
>
> The militia commander had brought her in, and that evening Martins saw four militia gangsters from his Darah Merah Integrasi gang (Red Blood for Integration) take her away to rape her.
>
> The next morning he saw her again, covered in blood. 'She cried and asked our help to take her to the church,' he said. 'It was only then I knew they had raped her because she couldn't walk, she was stumbling.'
>
> After the rapes, the woman was returned to the militia post, tied up and finally killed.[42]

Rape was used routinely during anti-Suharto riots in Jakarta, in 1998. In the late 1990s, I interviewed several Chinese families whose members had been brutally raped by gangs, often in front of police who either looked on aimlessly, or participated in the act.

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees' (UNHCR) National Commission on Human Rights denounced the 'systematic, barbarous and sadistic' rapes of Chinese women during the May riots on its official website, on July 8, 1998, and called for the punishment of those responsible. Human rights groups say they have documented evidence of over 100 cases of rape and sexual assault, mostly against Chinese women. On May 24, 1999 the same site quoted AFP: 'The UN investigator says that Chinese women who were raped during last year's riots in May have been threatened to keep them quiet. None of some 85 victims of sexual assault or rape has filed charges.'[43]

The accepted number of women gang raped in public at this time, many of them in Glodok neighbourhood of Jakarta, is now estimated at 160. No one is behind the bars for those crimes.

In October 2004, then Director of Education of Papua-New

Guinea (PNG), Sir Peter Baki, explained to me the plight of many Papuan children in the occupied territory:

> Our inspectors who work with the children were repeatedly told: Indonesian troops come regularly to remote villages in Papua. When they see girls they like, they detain them. Families are sent away and the soldiers hold the girls until they have forced sex with them. Then the girls are told to remain silent; otherwise the army would destroy the whole village. It's that simple: if the girls try to press charges and identify soldiers who raped them, relatives would be killed and the entire village could be destroyed.

Our conversation took place in Nandi, Fiji, where Baki was attending a UN-sponsored meeting. He approached me, asking for help to 'save Papuan children', providing grisly details of girls as young as nine crossing the border, escaping from occupied Papua with their genitals and nipples mutilated or burned by cigarettes.

When I arrived several months later in Port Moresby, PNG's capital, I was ready to investigate the allegations and to travel to two refugee camps set up for children near the border. Baki told me that the issue was being 'taken care of'. I spoke with several officials at the Ministry of Education and was told that the situation had not improved, and in fact was getting worse. An investigative journalist from Port Moresby later clarified to me that the Indonesian Embassy had intervened and my further investigations would be blocked.

'When our women go to Java', explained Papuan student Morcos Lokis Okin, 'they are preparing what they call "inside and outside", meaning mentally and physically. Many are suffering abuses.'[44]

Indonesia is obsessed with sex, but healthy and natural sexual expressions of it are being increasingly discouraged by religious fundamentalists. Repressed desire can mutate into unimaginable sexual brutality, often by those who are supposed to be promoting and advocating celibacy or restraint. Here is one typical example:

> Prosecutors on Tuesday asked the Langsa District Court in Aceh to sentence a member of the province's Wilayatul Hisbah Shariah Police to 12 years in prison for the alleged rape and torture of a 20-year-old female student in January …
>
> The victim was taken into custody for allegedly engaging in an immoral act with her boyfriend on Jalan Lingkar, near the PTPN-I Langsa ring road.
>
> Both the woman and her boyfriend were brought in by police

> and questioned over the alleged violation of the 2003 Shariah Public Indecency Law.
>
> Sayed said that a medical examination confirmed that the victim had been sexually assaulted and that she had suffered severe hemorrhaging as a result of the rape.[45]

Rape and sexual violence, as well as sexual harassment, are common all over Indonesia, but are hardly discussed in public. There is no official data, but discussing the issue off the record with several experts from the UN agencies I learned that 'an unusually high number of children in Indonesia, mostly girls, are sexually abused by their family members'. Naturally, in a society that demands virginity from brides, such information is almost never provided by the victims, who would most likely face excommunication if they dared to press charges.

In October 2011, Jakarta was shaken by an entire wave of rapes and some occurred effectively in public, in minivans with darkened windows. It is indisputable that Indonesia is an extremely violent society. Three genocides could serve as clear proof of it. It is undeniable that the country has been through so many conflicts and mass killings that it has a deeply damaged psyche and cannot function as a 'normal society'.

Despite all common sense, there has been no reconciliation process, no period of revelation, of reflecting and healing. Crimes of the past and present are being denied, psychological traumas ignored. Tension, frustration and anger remain. Outbursts of violence are common – for instance on the road, at the smallest disagreement. The victims, as is always the case here, are the most vulnerable members of society – women, children and minorities.

5

JAKARTA BLEEDING THE ISLANDS

RACISM ON THE RISE WHILE THERE IS NO CHANCE FOR INDEPENDENCE

In October 2005, I was sitting in the lobby of the Mulia Hotel in Jakarta with Ryaas Rasyid, former state minister of decentralization. He seemed to have hardly any hope left for his country, claiming that Indonesia was in such a miserable state that it might soon fall apart, splitting into at least nine independent states, while plunging into a brutal civil war. 'Java is acting like a colonial power', he explained. 'If they were allowed to do so, many islands, including Bali, would opt for independence.'

But they have never been allowed to. Any discussion on independence is banned. Several islands and island groups – some tricked into alliance by Jakarta – appear to be locked in a loveless and abusive marriage.

Numerous governments in the West, as well as multinational corporations, clearly have a strong interest in defending the integrity of the present Indonesian state, regardless of the desires, grievances and aspirations of people in different parts of the archipelago.

I wrote these words just one day after Papua declared its independence on October 19, 2011. As I landed in central Vietnam, where I intended to finish editing the final draft of this book, I received several text messages from Zely Ariane, an activist in the movement for Papua solidarity:

> The Papuan state had been declared, complete with its own government structure. So far we haven't received the news about the number of casualties, but there are casualties and what is certain is that many people are still in the mountains and security forces are trying to hunt them down. Hundreds of people have already been arrested. Some journalists who wanted to cover the event were beaten up …. There is very limited access to information.

According to the AHRC and other sources, the security forces killed

at least one person and arrested hundreds of participants at the Third Papuan People's Congress in Abepura.

Other nationalist and anti-multinational protesters were being killed on the island of Sulawesi, in Papua and elsewhere. At least two union protesters were killed in Timika (West Papua) in October 2011 during their struggle against the mining giant Freeport. In December 2011, at least 20 people were killed in Paniai, West Papua, while 26 villages were burned to the ground by a massive and brutal operation of the Indonesian police and military designed to break the armed resistance of pro-independence guerrillas. Ten thousand people had to flee the area (according to AHRC).[1]

In August 2011, two people were killed and six injured during a protest for community rights against the energy company PT Medco on Tiaka Island in Central Sulawesi. The Western media have reported these events little if at all.

SBY, the current president of Indonesia, is following the same path as his predecessor, Megawati Sukarnoputri, who in 2001 gave a now generally forgotten public speech to the TNI demanding that they 'disregard the issues of human rights in enforcing Indonesian unity and repressing any independence movement'.[2]

Indonesia could easily be described as the most racist country in the Asia-Pacific, and this is evident in the way it threatens its minorities, especially those who want to escape the iron grip of Jakarta. As if the three genocides the regime has committed are not enough, the minorities, and simply those who look different, are still being treated with arrogance, sarcasm and spite, and often with violence.

Even privileged white foreigners see plenty of racism. Unless they are staying in a five-star hotel or luxury condominium in a protected area of south or central Jakarta or Bali, the chances are that at least a few times a day they will have a finger pointed at their face by someone who calls them '*bule*' (albino, the derogatory word for whites). Milder, but still disconcerting, are the children and adults shouting 'Hey, mister!' But much worse treatment is given to Chinese, Africans, and worst of all, Papuans.

'Our people get the worst treatment,' explained one Papuan student, who did not want to be identified for security reasons. 'Many of us are not Muslim, and we are black. As a result, we have to suffer both verbal and physical abuse.'

Kontras coordinator Haris Azhar agreed: 'There is a lot of racism against Papuans.' He pointed at his mobile phone. 'I know hundreds

of people who would be ready to insult them, even those you would not expect it from. At the least, they would say: "Oh, look at them! Oh, they are funny looking, aren't they?"'[3]

Journalist John Pilger quoted a refugee who made it to Australia after a harrowing trip by a canoe: 'They treat West Papuans like animals. They kill us like animals. They have created militias and jihadis to do just that. It is the same as it used to be in East Timor.' Pilger added:

> For over a year, an estimated 6,000 people have been hiding in dense jungle after their villages and crops were destroyed by Indonesian special forces. Raising the West Papuan flag is 'treason'. Two men are serving 15- and ten-year sentences for merely trying. Following an attack on one village, a man was presented as an 'example' and petrol poured over him and his hair set alight.[4]

There used to be no single ethnic group in Indonesia that had suffered more than the Chinese, but now the most terrible lot is reserved for the Papuans. Century after century, decade after decade, the most hard-working and educated ethnic group on the Indonesian archipelago has been suffering from discrimination, harassment, physical attacks, mass rapes and pogroms.

Ester Jusuf, a leading Indonesian human rights lawyer, explained in *Terlena* (the film for which I wrote the script, in 2004):

> The scale of racial discrimination in Indonesia is enormous. People talk about human rights violations or about humanitarian issues, but are not focusing on the issues of Chinese minority in particular. Even if there were gross violations of human rights of the ethnic Chinese, this was not usually discussed and addressed. From 1740 to 1998, there were 12 racial unrests and nothing was resolved .... For hundreds of years, the ethnic Chinese learned that they have no legal protection. There was a pogrom in 1740 and then it was happening again and again. In 1740, it was performed by the colonial government and also by other ethnic groups who disliked ethnic Chinese. It became a pattern and no resolution ever arrived. The ethnic Chinese never received any legal protection.

In 1965 things got much worse – the religious cadres and the military accused the Chinese people of being atheists and siding with

'Red China'. What came after that was the anti-Chinese genocide. Ester Jusuf spoke about the following years:

> Chinese culture was banned. But that's not all; the state intruded the private area. There were raids of shops, houses and places of worship of the ethnic Chinese. Things that were considered to have affiliation with the People's Republic of China were confiscated and their owners were legally sanctioned. Even the statues of dragons and goddesses, and lamps, and cakes were banned.

The colour red could not be used even for painting the temples. Jusuf added, 'The Mandarin language, spoken and written, was banned. The impact was that the young generation of my age doesn't speak Mandarin. And we can't read or write it.'

Suharto selected the Chinese people as victims because they were the most capable and also the most vulnerable of Indonesia's minorities. After hundreds of thousands of ethnic Chinese had been killed, their fear was so acute that no member of the Chinese minority would have dared to go against the regime. After the genocide, Suharto handpicked several businessmen who were to be his loyal servants in implementing one of the most draconian capitalist systems in the world.

But the racist discrimination against the Chinese minority did not die after the 1960s. Indonesian architect Marco Kusumawijaya recalled in the same film:

> When I was still in Belgium, I was spat at by a kid, by a girl, when I was riding my bicycle. That was because she saw that I was Asian. And then a few months later I came back to Indonesia, and I had to file a request for my ID card from the government of Jakarta. To my surprise I had been sent to an agency called 'Agency for the Coordination of Monitoring the Movement of the Aliens'. So I am basically considered an alien; a foreigner who has to go through discriminatory filtering.

Tens of millions of Indonesians have suffered from racial discrimination. Most of them have endured it in silence. They would not dare to stir the water, call attention to their plight. They are too scared, too exhausted; they feel too helpless and hopeless. They are afraid even to admit their fear and their suffering.

In October 2011, I visited a church in the city of Solo,[5] which had been attacked by an Islamic suicide bomber. The attacker

died and several believers, many of them of Chinese origin, were injured. Among them were children. I asked four Chinese women, still wearing bandages, whether they felt fear or anger. The answers were unanimous: 'No anger and no fear. We are all protected by our Lord.'

Often, I am told that churches and storehouses I have photographed going up in flames, in Solo, Lombok, Ambon and elsewhere, never actually existed. The victims are so scared that they deny the existence of the church or shop, even though I saw it burning. When I produce photos, they often fall silent or walk away.

A NEOCOLONIAL EMPIRE

Tens of millions of inhabitants of the archipelago see Jakarta not as their own capital, but as the centre of a colonial empire that controls their home island. But to define it as such would be considered treason, and treason might be punished with a life term in prison, or even death. It would be dangerous to speak like that, especially since the New Intelligence Bill was passed.

On July 11, 2011, *The Telegraph* reported:

> Johan Teterisa was sentenced to life in prison for treason after dancers performing for President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and dozens of dignitaries in 2007 unfurled the independence flag in the place of the Republic of South Maluku flag. The development created an uproar, prompting Yudhoyono to take over the microphone, ordering their arrest. Other colleagues who had displayed the flag received sentences of seven to 20 years.[6]

What is really on the mind of the ethnic minorities in Indonesia? It is forbidden to ask and forbidden to talk. Of course, I did ask even so, and I got many replies, in whispers and behind closed doors. But to give the names of those who spoke would be a betrayal that puts them in danger.

I can confirm from what I learned, though, that given a free choice, many people in the islands would definitely choose independence. After decades of plunder, Jakarta is seen by many as the seat of thugs, of mafia, of looters; not as the beloved capital: 'If you are not with us, we break your leg! And remember, we know you've got a wife and a daughter. So shut up – make no noise.'

Almost everybody is hushed up and feels frightened.

CHINESE EXILE

In 2011, I witnessed the Chung Yuan ceremony in the city of Pontianak in Kalimantan. I wrote then for *China Daily Asia Weekly*:

> A group of Chinese people is standing in front of a huge replica of a ship. They are wearing red. They are burning incense just underneath the front portion of the ship, gathering food for the long journey. They chant in unison in the Chinese language while hundreds of spectators are standing by in anticipation of something enormous they are about to witness; something far beyond this humble neighbourhood, this poor and anxious city – even beyond their imagination.
>
> The crew of the ship is standing still, proudly staring forward. There is the ship's captain, the first officer, the second officer, and there is the entire crew. The men are all made from cartons and plastic, but so what, one would say – it is all about symbolism, and those who created the crew did their best to give it great dignity and strength. The ship is real, and by now it is loaded with food, drink, cigarettes and paper money. It stands on wooden supports and its sails are full of wind.
>
> Right behind the compound, Bhakti Suci, where the ship awaits its imminent journey is the Chinese cemetery – vast and well-kept, surrounded by green fields.
>
> In one single act that lasts a few minutes, the food is given to the local people – to the poor.
>
> The men then lift their flaming torches towards the sky. Fuel is spilled all over the vessel. Everybody moves back, except a few of those who will send the crew, the ship and, above all, the souls, on their long journey back home – to China, to the Mainland, where many local Chinese people feel they belong.
>
> Then the flames – tremendous, hot and merciless, engulf the ship. Those of us who are too close feel the heat hitting our skin, lifting up our hair. Loud explosions are heard, the wood is cracking, and the burned paper flies towards the sky. Everything is in motion and in its own way; the ship begins its sail, engulfed in a ball of fire.
>
> Lost souls, deceased men and women are going home.
> 'Ghost money' is burning together with the ship and that is good – it will make sure that the spirits will be well taken care in the other world.

The crew is standing still – it does not budge – even as the flames take possession of their uniforms and then of their bodies. They are expected to bring their people home and that's what they are doing, with calm pride and serenity.

So much suffering, so much pain, is riding on this boat. Unimaginable is the agony of the Chinese people in this part of the world, where hundreds of thousands were murdered in cold blood, where everybody had to give up his or her name, forget the Chinese language, Chinese culture, Chinese food, and even red lamps and dragons.

Now they are going home where they belong. They are going to Mainland China.

The ship is now one big ball of flames and firefighters have turned on their sirens. Jets of water begin to join the flames – fire and water, two extremes in breathtaking unison.

The poor, and the kids, from the neighbourhood, are running around – some carrying food, some trying to catch ashes flying from the ship.

Homecoming begins, and there is more than a thousand Li long journey ahead, but the first step is already made; it is made and it leads through the tears of those who are destined to remain; through flames and ash and so many memories, that no water and no flame could manage to erase.

GENOCIDE IN PAPUA

There is no place in today's Asia where human rights have been violated with as much vigour and impunity as in Papua. Some impartial analysts call the occurrences in the resource-rich but now totally impoverished Micronesian land genocide. By the most conservative estimates, at least 100,000 Papuans have been killed by the Indonesian military, but the numbers are most probably several times higher.

At the beginning of August 2011, the National Committee for West Papua (KNPB) marched in support of a legal pro-independence conference being held in Oxford, UK. Such support events took place in several major towns of West Papua. One solidarity event even occurred in front of the Presidential Palace in Jakarta, where at least one activist – Paulus Suryanta Ginting, one of the leaders of a new left-wing political party, PPR[7] – was beaten, then dragged to a police van, driven to the police station,

interrogated for several hours, and forced to sign a declaration stating that 'he will stop repeatedly provoking the nation'.

I met Ginting a day later,[8] and he explained:

> I was invited to attend the rally in support of the conference of lawyers in the UK, gathering in support of independence of Papua. The police claimed we did not have the necessary permit. We argued that we gave them advance notice. While the argument was going on, we sang two KNPB songs and then I made a speech. I said 'Long live Papua! Long live the Papuan movement!' Then one police shouted at me: 'You are betraying your nation!' They pulled me, kicked me, and began beating me up.

The *Jakarta Globe*, one of two main Indonesian newspapers published in English, concluded in its article on the event in the most predictable, servile and laconic way:

> Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa played down the significance of the Oxford conference, which is being hosted by the group International Lawyers for West Papua in a bid to bring cases of rampant human rights abuses in Papua before an international tribunal.
>
> 'The movement is not that big because they [involve] the same old people,' he said.
>
> 'I used to live in England so I know them. Their efforts never gain the support of the British people or government.' Marty, the former ambassador to Britain, said he was sure the British government would continue to support Indonesia's policy on special autonomy for Papua.[9]

He is most likely correct.

John Pilger wrote in March 2006 with passion and outrage about the ongoing genocide in West Papua:

> When the Netherlands gave Indonesia its independence in 1949, it argued that West Papua was a separate geographic and ethnic entity with a distinctive national character. A report published last November by the Institute of Netherlands History in The Hague revealed that the Dutch had secretly recognized the 'unmistakable beginning of the formation of a Papuan state,' but were bullied by the administration of John F. Kennedy to accept 'temporary'

> Indonesian control over what a White House adviser called 'a few thousand miles of cannibal land'.[10]

The situation – present and past – in West Papua is fairly transparent. Indonesia received backing from the United States and other Western nations to 'incorporate' Papua into the country in the 1960s. Jakarta promised to conduct a fair referendum, which predictably turned into a charade, because the Papuan people were systematically intimidated and barred from campaigning on the basis of independence. After annexing Papua, Indonesia unleashed a campaign of terror, not unlike that in East Timor after the invasion. The fight for independence by the Free Papua Movement guerrilla group has served as justification for forced resettlements, the burning of villages, torture, extrajudicial killings and rapes by the Indonesian armed forces.

Bustar Maitar from Greenpeace is Bugis (the ethnic group from South Sulawesi) and grew up in Papua, which he still considers his home. We discussed the tragedy of Papua in Jakarta, in August 2011, and he commented:

> When you think about the size of Papua, it is simply mind-blowing – 40 million hectares of land! But only 3.5 to 4 million people live there. Of which only 1.5 million are native Papuan people. It is very clear that the Indonesian government only loves Papuan land, not the Papuan people. Or, more precisely, the government and big companies love everything that is above and below the Papuan land. Things are extracted from that land, which is stripped of all natural resources. And there is no plan to do anything for the Papuan people.

He predicted a frightening future:

> There is a plan for the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate in Papua. This plan covers an area of almost 2 million hectares. For this they will need roughly 4 million workers. What does it mean? Huge transmigration and further reduction of the local people to an even smaller minority.
>
> As things are now, Papuan people cannot expect justice or to fight for their rights. Whenever they protest, they are labeled as 'separatists' and brutally punished. For instance, the people of Bintuni Bay asked for compensation after indiscriminate logging. The police were called and they attacked the

> people. Shots were fired and there were deaths. Naturally, the government replied that 'they didn't care for the Free Papua Movement'.

Maitar and many others see a slow genocidal process at work. Alcohol is being promoted although it is not part of the Papuan culture. The staple crop is being changed, from sago to rice, demanding intensive agriculture in a land where people have traditionally been food gatherers.

Tens of thousands of locals are being forced to convert to Islam. There are many schemes that include loans being offered to poor Papuans who unable to pay them back, eventually lose their land and are then offered the chance to regain it in exchange for their religious conversion. There are marriage schemes with Muslim partners. There are direct threats and intimidations. Hundreds of thousands are descending on Papua from other Indonesian islands – in a government-sponsored programme called Trans-Migration, a programme implemented during the Suharto era, designed to turn indigenous people all over the archipelago into minorities in their own lands.

'A large number of elite individuals in Jakarta actually live on the plunder from Papua. There is Freeport and there are enormous timber concessions,' Maitar explained. 'In Papua not one concession operates without having the military included in the deal. All timber concessions are related to the TNI.'

'It is a well-known fact that Papua has many ethnic groups, and hundreds of languages. Sometimes, it is extremely difficult to get to some mountainous or other areas, and even if one gets there, it is not easy to communicate and find out what the problem really is,' I was told by Saleh Abdullah, secretary general to the board of Insist, a progressive NGO and publishing house based in Yogyakarta. Abdullah had worked on several occasions in Papua as a consultant. He went on:

> You know, the reason why the US gave Papua to Indonesia was because they had been able to determine from satellites in space the amount of natural resources there. They knew that they'd be able to access them under Indonesian rule.
>
> Real hotspots are several and Timika is definitely one of them. That's where Freeport operates. Now, I heard that BP is getting involved, too. There is oil and mining. There is no way one could get there unless everything is officially prearranged. Once I

> stopped at Timika but had to stay inside my hotel because of the riots all over the city.
>
> Companies used to pay money to both the army and the police. The local police got regularly Rp300 million (US$ 35,000), and that was, in early 2000, a huge pot of money.[11]

Like many others who have worked in Papua, Abdullah is passionate about the place and about its people, who are suffering tremendous injustice. But it seems that solutions are almost non-existent. The Indonesian state, its military and foreign 'advisers', has made sure that the independence of Papua is almost impossible to achieve. Its 1.5 million people – now a minority in their own land – are facing the military of one of the most populous nations in the world, while the 'diplomatic efforts' of the West are blocking any legal negotiations, let alone a referendum on independence. Like an enormous wounded creature, Papua is being tied up and eaten alive.

'I once visited a village called Ayam', recalled Abdullah:

> I went to the school, and I wanted to meet the principal. There was no principal and no teachers, only one girl, from Bugis, wearing a headscarf. She said the principal and teachers never came there. There are hardly any social services in this place. Doctors have no motorcycles and there are hardly any records on patients, and these records are being shifted from official to official. Education – zero! I was told by a friend that in Timika the sixth grade schoolchildren couldn't read.

Abdullah concluded his lament:

> I have a cousin there. He used to work as a police intelligence official in Papua. He told me that the OPM was not the real threat to him. It was Kopassus [the notorious special forces] of the TNI that are the real enemies. Case closed! My cousin also said it was no big deal to hang around guys from the Free Papua Movement. He used to pop beer cans with them. But Kopassus – that was a killer!

When the United States 'gave' Papua to Indonesia, it made certain conditions, but Indonesia has not honoured them, and there has been little or no Western pressure for it to do so.

Professors John Wing and Peter King from the University of Sydney have researched the process of Papua joining Indonesia. Their

research showed that in 1962 in New York, the Dutch and Indonesian governments signed an agreement that obliged Indonesia to hold a referendum on the future of Papua called 'Act of Free Choice'. The United Nations, as well as the US and Dutch governments, was supposed to guarantee this democratic process that would show the 'true preference of the population for integration or separation'. But Indonesia did all it could to ensure that the result of the referendum would be in its favour. It used the 'anti-subversion' measures provided for in Presidential Decrees Nos. 8 and 11 of 1963 to hush up anti-integration sentiments and to 'remove any sense of Papuan identity from the community'. It also banned the singing of the Papuan national anthem and the raising of the Morning Star flag.

Wing and King noted:

> Widespread military operations were conducted from 1965–69, and an AFP correspondent in Papua during 1969 noted: 'Indonesian troops and officials were waging a widespread campaign of intimidation to force the Act of Free Choice in favour of the Republic.' During 1968–69, operations were conducted against the civilian population in the Arfak mountains area and Enarotali, involving aerial bombardment and the dropping of 500 paratroopers.
>
> Two junior politicians and members of the West Irianese Provincial Assembly, Clemens Runaweri and Willem Zongganau, crossed the border into the Australian administered territory of Papua and New Guinea in May 1969 and asked the authorities to help them get to the UN. The men carried documents proving Indonesian repression, explosive evidence which may have had a bearing on the Papuan question being discussed in New York. They were not only refused help to travel, they were prevented from leaving Manus Island. On a request from Adam Malik, the Indonesian Foreign Minister, the Australian, Dutch and US governments conspired to deny travel documentation necessary for their international movement between the period June-August 1969.
>
> In the large towns, such as Jayapura, Manokwari and Merauke, violence against dissenters was witnessed and reported in the media. The elections of representatives who would vote for integration were carefully stage managed, with the Indonesian security and intelligence agencies maintaining tight control over proceedings. President Suharto said in February that Papuans who voted against integration would be guilty of 'treason'.
>
> For the referendum the Indonesian Government chose 1,026 voters of a population of 815,906, who voted unanimously for integration.

> Papua was henceforth declared a Military Operation Zone and freedom of movement was severely restricted. Expressions of cultural identity, such as songs sung in local languages, were considered a manifestation of a separatist movement and were punishable by torture and even death.[12]

Papua could easily be the most devastated part of the world by the time this book goes to print, its grimness only rivalled by places like East Kivu in Congo/DRC and Somalia.

On December 30, 2010, Jay Griffiths published a powerful article and appeal, 'Indonesia's slow motion genocide', with an equally powerful strapline: 'By ignoring Indonesian army killings in West Papua, the Western press is tacitly colluding in mass murder':

> Although the US Leahy Law forbids funding to military units that violate human rights, Kopassus is now being supported by President Obama, under the guise of fighting terrorism. The Kopassus document gives the lie to that, showing their systematic targeting of civilians. Number five on their list is the current president of the Papuan Presidium Council, whose predecessor, Theys Eluay, had his throat slit in 2001. While I was in West Papua, I met the then-president, who told me he had also been the victim of a failed assassination.
>
> … Rewind to 1967, when president Suharto's men struck a deal to hand over West Papua's wealth of natural resources to international companies, including a mountain of copper and gold – now the world's most valuable mine, Freeport McMoRan.
>
> In return, Indonesia received billions of corporate dollars plus, crucially, international connivance in covering up human rights abuses. Racism played a part: those who would suffer, said the British embassy, were merely 'a relatively small number of very primitive people', occupying what a White House adviser dismissed as 'a few thousand miles of cannibal land'.
>
> … Human rights organizations repeatedly bring massacres and abuses to the attention of the media, who repeatedly ignore them. In these lethal omissions, the press tacitly colludes in mass murder.[13]

TIMOR-LESTE

In December 1975, General Suharto sent troops to a poor nation that just one month earlier had declared its independence from Portugal. The official justification given by Indonesia was in the

spirit of the Cold War: the communist menace threatening the area. What the Indonesian government was referring to was the fact that people of East Timor democratically elected the left-wing Fretilin movement as their legitimate government.

Of course the pretext for intervention would have been laughable were it not that the United States was in the process of losing the war in Vietnam and the 'domino effect' theory held sway in Washington. East Timor was then one of the poorest and tiniest nations in Asia with only 800,000 inhabitants, no paved roads, no telephone lines and hardly any weapons. For decades it had suffered from what former President Gusmão described to me as 'colonial neglect by Portugal'. But it had tremendous natural resources on the bottom of the sea: natural gas and petroleum, something that was only suspected in 1975, but was proven later.

Invasion boats, combat helicopters and paratroopers descended on this beautiful and quiet place – which forms the eastern part of Timor Island – frightening its gentle and non-confrontational people. What followed was a prolonged and consistent massacre performed by many familiar individuals (particularly those who belonged to the notorious special forces Kopassus), the same in many instances as those who were stained by the massacres of 1965 and since 1963 in Papua.

In October 1999, Noam Chomsky wrote for *Le Monde Diplomatique*:

> Indonesia invaded the territory in December 1975, relying on US diplomatic support and arms, used illegally, but with secret authorization from Washington; there were even new arms shipments sent under the cover of an official 'embargo'.

About 200,000 people – or one-third of the entire nation – were massacred or died from various occupation-related causes, including hunger. Suharto justified all this with a bombastic, 'We will not tolerate another Cuba next to our shores', and received applause and a green light once again, from the United States ('as long as our equipment is not used'), Australia, the United Kingdom and other Western countries. As in other parts of the world, the people of Timor Leste were punished for choosing a left-wing government.[14]

In August 1975, only three months prior to the Indonesian invasion of East Timor, the Australian ambassador to Indonesia, Richard Woolcott, had sent a cable to Canberra, urging acquiescence with Indonesia's plans:

> It would seem to me that this department [of Minerals and Energy] might well have an interest in closing the present gap in the agreed sea border and this could be much more readily negotiated with Indonesia than with Portugal; or independent Portuguese Timor .... I know I am recommending a pragmatic rather than a principled stand but that is what national interest and foreign policy is all about.[15]

Supporting the invasion is a cause for shame that should never leave the psyche of the Australian people, particularly since it was East Timor, or more precisely its brave and loyal people, who at tremendous sacrifice (estimated at between 40,000 and 70,000 human lives) had engaged the Japanese Imperial Army during the Second World War, preventing it from invading Australia.

To fully describe the suffering of the Timorese people would require an entire book. The brutality and barbarity of the Indonesian troops is only comparable to the acts committed by Nazi Germany in Europe and by European colonial administrations in Africa, the Middle East and some parts of Asia. The most ingenious torture was used, mass rapes were performed with striking regularity, and many people disappeared, being executed or starved to death. It was almost as if 1965 had come once again, only on a much smaller territory. The victims were the local Maubere people, almost non-human in the eyes of the Indonesian invaders. The racism of the invaders was appalling, and explains the scale and sadism of the slaughter.

The BBC reported on 7 December 2001:

> The United States gave Indonesia the green light for the bloody 1975 invasion of East Timor, subjecting the territory to 24 years of occupation, according to newly released state documents .... The documents record talks in Jakarta between the then US President Gerald Ford, then Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and Indonesia's former President Suharto, a day before the invasion of East Timor ...
>
> Mr Kissinger has insisted over the years that the Timor issue never arose during the talks with Suharto...
>
> But new details of the conversation, made available by the National Security Archive, reveal otherwise ...
>
> Mr Suharto briefed Mr Ford and Mr Kissinger about his plans for the former Portuguese colony, and they expressed understanding for the proposal ...

> This marked the start of an occupation which left as many as 200,000 dead.[16]

It was all documented, and the leaders of the Western powers were well aware of the genocide that was taking place in East Timor. The United Nations tried to get involved and stop the atrocities, but the US ambassador to the United Nations, Daniel Moynihan, actively and successfully blocked their intervention.

The occupation lasted till 1999, when a pro-independence referendum clearly expressed the will of the people. The result was celebrated by yet another bloodbath executed by pro-Jakarta militias. What followed was an international intervention, the UN Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) and finally formalized independence on May 20, 2002, when Xanana Gusmão was sworn as the country's first president.

I visited the occupied territory on several occasions in the 1990s. I used buses and ferries to get to the island of Flores, then took Pelni inter-island ferries to smuggle myself to Dili, the capital of East Timor. On one occasion, I witnessed the aftermath of mass rapes performed by Indonesian troops around the town of Ermera, interviewing a priest who decided to risk his own life and hide dozens of women in the cellar of his church.

I was tracked, detained and brutally interrogated; my films (it was before the digital era) were confiscated and developed, then were most likely destroyed. Only the intervention by a couple of Australian anthropologists, who were visiting the area and who promptly contacted my embassy, saved my life.

Before leaving I managed to meet Bishop Belo, who later received the Nobel Peace Price. At the end of the interview I asked him what message he would like to send to the world. 'Tell them to pray for us,' he replied, emphasizing that he did not think there was much anyone would be willing to do for his people. He was correct: I published my story in the Czech Republic, Turkey and Latin America. There was no appetite for it in the United States, the United Kingdom or Australia.

The deeper I became involved in investigating Indonesia and the brutality it showed towards its colonies, the more it was becoming clear to me that in the Western mass media it was almost taboo to write on the brutality of Southeast Asian allies.

When I first arrived in East Timor in the early 1990s, the fear on the streets was so strong that I could almost feel it physically. People were like shadows, walking close to the walls, hiding their faces.

John Roosa and Joseph Nevins wrote:

> Apart from the pillaging of Indonesia's resource base, the Suharto regime caused an astounding level of unnecessary suffering. At his command, the Indonesian military invaded neighbouring East Timor in 1975 after receiving a green light from President Gerald Ford and his Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger. The result was an occupation that lasted for almost 24 years and left a death toll of tens of thousands of East Timorese.[17]

Despite the fact that information is now widely available, there seems to be no soul-searching in Indonesia and no pressure to put on trial those Indonesians responsible for the atrocities. And as has already been noted (see pages 74–8), many members of the current Indonesian political establishment, including SBY himself, were involved in the invasion and its aftermath.

ETAN sent an appeal to the US secretary of state Clinton a few days before her 2011 visit to Indonesia:

> The U.S., as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, should work to establish an international tribunal to bring to justice the perpetrators of human rights crimes committed during Indonesia's 24-year occupation of Timor-Leste. This would provide a measure of justice to the victims and their families and serve as a deterrent to future human rights violators. A tribunal is supported by the many victims of these crimes and by human rights advocates in Timor-Leste, Indonesia, the U.S., and elsewhere.[18]

'It boils down to individual responsibility for atrocities,' explained Haris Azhar, coordinator of Kontras:

> In this case, once again Indonesia failed to be independent and impartial. In Indonesia, there is very little knowledge about what really happened in Timor-Leste, the magnitude of it. The government reluctantly agreed that there were atrocities, but only in the 1990s! War criminals like General Wiranto were never prosecuted, and the role of SBY, when he was serving there, was never clarified.[19]

'Timor-Leste is still a new country. We don't have the resources to catch human rights violators. We need help from the international

community,' I was told on April 9, 2011, in Dili, by Sisto dos Santos from HAK Association (Law, Basic Rights and Justice):

> We established a relationship between the civil societies: between those in Indonesia and here, but not with the individuals who violated human rights. Our objective is not revenge; it is to end the impunity for those involved in gross human rights violations in Timor Leste, Papua, Ambon and Aceh.

I spoke to all three leaders of East Timor. I discussed the past and the present with Xanana Gusmão in Dili, with Ramos Horta in Melbourne (we were both invited as speakers by Melbourne University) and Mari Alkatiri in Jakarta. None of them had the appetite to risk a confrontation with Jakarta over the genocide and the impunity the Indonesian military was enjoying. However, Mari Alkatiri told me on September 13, 2007 in the Hotel Sultan in Jakarta:

> Both nations need to know the truth. That's exactly the point. Solutions would be possible only if both sides could be informed about what really occurred. Infrastructure for the solution is the truth. People have to socialize; they have to understand. I think this is the main target. If achieved, then our two countries could start afresh. Whether to seek justice or to offer amnesty, that's up to the commission to decide.

The truth is exactly what the Indonesian public refuses to acknowledge. All three genocides are denied, as if they never took place. And the Indonesian media is extremely careful not to call them by their name and not to step on the toes of the members of the security forces that committed the atrocities who are now in power.

According to ETAN, 'Indonesia has objected to the setting of up of a UN rights inquiry into the East Timor violence, saying it is capable of investigating allegations of atrocities and human rights abuses itself, and that it will not be bound by the UN findings.'[20]

ACEH

In January 2005 I landed in Aceh at the very tip of North Sumatra Island, to map the disaster for the progressive US-based political think-tank the Oakland Institute. I interviewed dozens of victims

and international relief workers, as well as leaders of the Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM), or the Free Aceh Movement, a separatist group that had fought for independence from Indonesia in a bitter insurgency that lasted almost 30 years and left 15,000 people dead. My report was titled 'Aceh abandoned – the second tsunami'. The first – the most devastating – tsunami occurred after the mighty offshore earthquake in December 2004, killing around 250,000 people. The second tsunami (as locals call it, despite the fact that it occurred before the natural calamity) came in 2003, when the Indonesian military launched a major offensive against GAM, declaring a state of emergency, and committing human rights abuses against Aceh's civilians.

In 2005, away from the coastal areas of Aceh, I detected almost no destruction. The roads passed through pristine countryside; green fields and sleepy villages, with high mountains in the distance. All this looked like a stereotypical image of an earthly paradise, taken straight from some tourist brochure. The only disturbance came from armoured police and military trucks, driven at breakneck speed, pushing all other vehicles off the road. There were military and police checkpoints in every village. And in almost every house I found misery, fear and often hunger.

I was driven to the area of Desa Siron, to the old village of Keureung Krung. All the houses there were traditional ones, made of wood. As we approached, the entire village ran towards the car to welcome us. I asked about refugees. There were several families living in the village that had managed to escape from the devastated areas on the coast, right after the tsunami hit.

'These children lost their families. Their relatives were swept away by the sea,' explained an old woman with a wrinkled and exhausted face:

> We received no aid from the government. There is nothing we can do; we went to Lambaro and talked to the government officials. They gave us nothing; they sent no people here. We were trying to talk to the district leader, but he refused to see us. Nobody cares, especially the government. We need food, we need medicine; we need some help for children who experienced terrible trauma. We are so angry! People in this village are feeding us. They are the only ones willing to help, but they have almost nothing themselves.

After some hesitation, a group of elders decided to approach me.

They needed to speak to me, they said. We entered a small, humble mosque and seated ourselves on the floor in a circle.

'You are the first foreigner who has ever come here', declared the village chief:

> Nobody ever visits this place; we are cut off from the world. The military come here several times a week, always at night. They torture us and they beat us; we feel humiliated and desperate. The military ask the same question: 'Where is the GAM?' They give us no time to answer; they begin beating us, putting our head under the water until we can't breath. They even beat women.
>
> They usually arrive at 3 am; four or six of them, riding Honda motorbikes. They are from Pasukan Raider [Raider Troops], but they have no name tags. All we know is that their leader's nickname is Ampah.
>
> Once I was tortured so brutally that I couldn't move for hours, afterwards. We are not brave enough to fight back – they have guns and we are not armed. And they seem to be drunk, or maybe insane. They torture our elders, even one blind man from this village. They just enjoy doing it! They shoot our animals, shooting cows with machine guns, point blank. They destroy houses and prevent us from tending to our rambutan trees, cucumber and rice fields …. They break our fences, so the wild animals can get in and domestic animals can escape.
>
> They killed almost 20 men around here, some five months ago. There was no battle, no confrontation. We don't want the Indonesian military around here! We have had enough; we can't take it any more. This is happening all over Aceh; not only in the villages here, but everywhere outside the major cities.
>
> How can we ever make a deal with Indonesia? How can we even talk? They never listen to us. They just beat us; torture us before we can say anything. People here say that Aceh has been hit by the second tsunami. Our first tsunami was the imposition of martial law in May 2003.

After some complicated security manoeuvres (meeting local guides and exchanging passwords at provisory checkpoints), I was taken to meet one of the GAM military leaders, Commander Nasir, who was in charge of the area of Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar. I had to climb a steep rocky mountain, before encountering two fully armed fighters, who escorted me to their commander, a 40-year-old man with a moustache and a firm handshake.

At that time, peace talks in Helsinki between the Indonesian government and GAM had just collapsed. The government refused to even discuss the possibility of a referendum, fearing that the Acehnese people would overwhelmingly vote for independence, as the people in East Timor had done not long before.

I asked Nasir about GAM's long-term strategy, and he told me:

> We will fight for the freedom of Aceh, and we will never give up before it is achieved. We want full independence from Indonesia, but we will yield to the wish of our people. If they would opt for something lesser, we will have to accept. But first of all, people have to be consulted: they should have a free referendum. Whatever their decision is, the GAM will comply.

Several days after our meeting on top of the mountain near Banda Aceh, Indonesian security forces killed Commander Nasir. I did not find this out until my next visit to Aceh, in 2011.

After the tragedy of 2004, Aceh remained in the global spotlight for several months – long enough for foreign governments and NGOs to get involved and negotiate a peace agreement between the rebels and Jakarta, which was finally signed in Helsinki on August 15, 2005. The result was that, after 29 years of civil war, Aceh did not receive full independence, instead settling for something called 'special autonomy'. Jakarta made sure that this time there was no misunderstanding. The options for Aceh were twofold: strive for independence and meet with force and continued suffering, or take peace and settle for 'semi-autonomy'. They opted for the latter compromise. Aceh was exhausted and wounded by almost three decades of conflict and the near-complete destruction of its capital by the forces of nature. GAM formed a political party, which won 33 of the 69 seats in the Aceh parliament in 2009.

My 2011 visit to Aceh was to carry out research for this book. It was raining as I arrived. From the window of the plane I could see the coastline, outlying islands and green rice fields. A few new settlements were clearly visible on the hills. They looked neat and orderly. At the new Sultan Iskandarmuda International Airport, we disembarked straight into the building, in stark contrast to the practice in most Indonesian airports, where passengers are forced to make their way across potholed tarmac. The terminal was clean. My luggage arrived promptly. Then the real surprise: driving on a well-paved road the 20 km to the capital Banda Aceh, crossing modern bridges with pedestrian walkways and passing neat villages

along the way. The city is now arguably the most attractive in Indonesia, with well-preserved historical and colonial buildings and riverfront.

These favourable first impressions were soon balanced by other information. 'The master plan of Banda Aceh is actually not good,' explained Salma Waty, a lecturer at Syiah Kuala University, as her husband kindly drove us around the city and the province. 'Drainage is a total disaster. Now all the big contractors come from Jakarta, not from here. There is never an integrated solution, roads are repeatedly opened up and digging is done again and again to satisfy business interests.'

'There is continuity in plundering Aceh from outside and from within Indonesia,' said Hendra Fadly, Aceh coordinator of Kontras, and his deputy Ferry:

> In the 1970s, the gas company PT Arun and its counterpart Exxon Mobil sent all their profits abroad and to Jakarta; only 1 per cent remained in Aceh. After the Helsinki peace agreement, 30 per cent was supposed to go to Jakarta and 70 per cent remain here. But that is only on paper. Local politicians keep asking about this agreement, but Jakarta uses a bag of tricks to avoid fulfilling its obligations. So many clauses of the Helsinki agreement are not being addressed at all. If people could vote freely tomorrow, most of them would opt for independence.

Shadia Marhaban, one of the Helsinki negotiators, is now president of the Aceh Women's League (LINA). 'The plundering of the natural resources of Aceh is a serious problem. We should stop logging and mining now,' she said. 'Aceh is being exploited once again, but often in different ways than before. In the past, exploitation was mainly because of TNI but now even former GAM people are involved .... GAM lacks experience in governing.'

It is no secret that the war in Aceh was largely driven by Jakarta's desire to keep the area's vast natural resources under its control. Western companies that had signed lucrative business deals with Suharto have always been firmly opposed to independence for Aceh and Papua.

Rachmat Junaedy, a member of the Partai Rakyat Aceh (Aceh People's Party, PRA) spoke sadly about the events since 2004–05: 'The plundering of Aceh is the same as before. There is hardly any benefit for the people. Almost all the big national and multinational companies are exporting natural resources from Aceh. And

TNI is actually protecting the logging and mining sites. It is paid to do so.'

'Local people are frequently forced to sell their land to big companies. Those who refuse to sell face intimidation, even violence,' says Muhajir, a civil society coordinator in Lhoong. 'The tricks are used, but also intimidation by former soldiers. Often there is physical violence.'

On July 8, 2011, Reuters reported that 'A U.S. appeals court on Friday revived a lawsuit against Exxon Mobil Corp by Indonesian villagers who accused the oil giant's security forces of committing murder, torture and other wrongdoing.'[21] It would be useful to investigate what exact percentage the TNI forms in such 'security forces'. According to the testimonies of local people, they are in the majority.

Back in Jakarta, Haris Azhar of Kontras spoke about the fear in Acehnese society:

> Naturally, the fear began in the past, when people were randomly killed, disappeared and underwent savage torture. But now it appears that the peace agreement has brought new fears. Aceh is efficiently and quickly being stripped of all it possesses. If deforestation, mining and gas exploration continue at this speed, Aceh will be left with nothing more than its scarred land.

KALIMANTAN

Kalimantan fears the same future as Aceh. The plunder and destruction of outlying regions of Indonesia are shocking and irreversible. It seems that no part of this unfortunate archipelago is being spared, from devastated and logged-out Sumatra (see Chapter 7) to the Moluccas, from Java itself to the once mysterious Indonesian part of the island of Borneo, Kalimantan.

'Great parts of Kalimantan are ruined because of palm oil plantations', explained Bustar Maitar, head of the forest campaign at Greenpeace SEA-Indonesia, during our encounter in August 2011:

> A good example is what happened with the Riak Bumi people, transition of their social life from nomadic to what could be described as transitional. Natural resources have all been taken away from them. They were made to be fully dependent on the government, which applies a very simple formula: we give

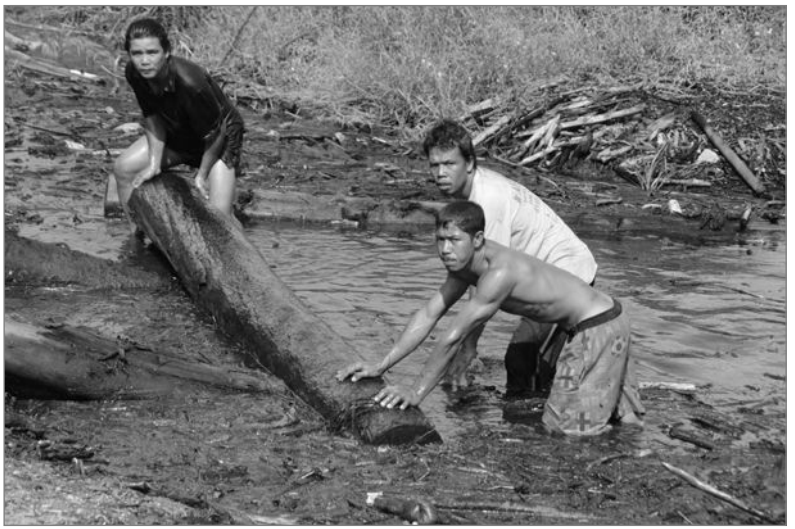

Photo 5.1 Locals rolling logs through a puddle polluted by chemicals near Ambawang village, West Kalimantan

> you rice and you give us your land. After that, companies and government can take almost anything from the people.

The road from Pontianak towards the Malaysian border passes through one depressing village after another. Except for palm oil and rubber plantations there is nothing in sight – all the native vegetation is gone. Creeks have been diverted and their colour is toxic – in some places metallic red, in others black.

'Is Kalimantan finished?' I asked, looking around in horror. Mr Jefry, who works for Riak Bumi, an Indonesian community-based natural resource management organization, was not being negative, just realistic, when he lamented:

> From Sanggau to here, it is finished. Even so called Conservation Forests are logged out. It is a nightmare. Everything here had been stolen; we have almost nothing left. But people are still living their terrible lives. What happened with all that cash? The dream of the people here is to live like Malaysians, but they've got nothing: the money is gone!

'Gone where?' I asked.

> Companies came here without any coordination from the government. The government only made promises to us, but delivered nothing. Now people here live like they used to live decades ago: subsistence farming, some have pigs. In the villages, around 60 per cent of adults are literate but functional literacy is only around 40 per cent, although I am only guessing. When in need, when confronted with hunger or illness, people don't go to Jakarta or to Surabaya, they go to Malaysia.

Along the road, huge cigarette advertisements were celebrating the 66th anniversary of Indonesian independence: 'L.A. LIGHTS. Republic Indonesia. 66 tahun.'

In Pontianak, poverty is everywhere,' explained Mr Muhlis, a local writer and journalist, as we were crossing the river on a small dinghy:

> I don't understand why the government can't give at least some subsidies to the people in the provinces. Farther from the central government, everything becomes more expensive. The government should at least subsidize transportation expenses so that people in Java and in Kalimantan or Papua could enjoy the same prices for basic necessities. Here, water is sold per gallon and it costs Rp36,000 (around US$ 4.00), more than three times the price in Jakarta.

Of course, the subsidies are moving in the opposite direction. In post-1965 Indonesia, the poor are expected to subsidize the rich, while getting nothing in return. To protest is to risk being labelled as a 'communist' or 'atheist'. For wanting to break this grotesque arrangement, people could be branded as 'separatists' and face the death penalty.

'In the villages around Kampung Badau, people are now raising Malaysian flags instead of Indonesian', explained Hermayani Putra, WWF director for West Kalimantan, whom I met in his office in August 2011:

> Compared to the villages in the Malaysian state of Sarawak across the border, our people have nothing – no medical facilities, no good schools. In Badau subdistrict, many children have to cross the border and study on the Malaysian side, even get medical services there. It is hard to imagine, but Malaysia is even providing electricity. Badau people are grateful. And Malaysians

> say they could cover the entire of Kalimantan with an electric grid.

For a while, we discussed the disappearing species of Kalimantan, from the rhino that was hunted to extinction in the 1960s and 1970s to the iconic orang-utan, which is now close to disappearing as there are hardly any trees left that are suitable for providing food for this great ape. But somehow we kept coming back to the suffering of people and to the plunder that has destroyed this island – the third largest in the world.

Putra explained:

> Our government had chosen palm oil. There were all those promises of ecological development and those relating to the social system. Now look at what is happening: billions of dollars are being made annually, but who is benefiting: investors, the government, or the people? People are not the ones, definitely. Paradoxically, the local people used to have free access to clean water, to hunting and fishing. Now they have nothing.

'Has life really changed in West Kalimantan since Suharto stepped down?' I asked a man at a humble roadside eatery in a remote place called Warung Cantik. Kristof was from Kabupaten Sanggau, a student of law in his forties, who had decided to change his life as an adult. He replied:

> It's all just talk. Now we can poke fun at the president, that's all we gained. All parties here are the same. No party defends the people. Political parties only come here when they want something. During elections – local or national – they have so-called 'political xxx'. 'If you elect me, you will get this or that.' After elections, people have no mechanism to get what they were promised.

Kristof worried about Kalimantan; he worried a lot, especially, about the way it is governed. He reckoned that soon, within ten or twenty years, there will be nothing left there. He mentioned his *kampung* (village); there was a conservation area, but people had begun 'opening' the forest for farming. Not long after they began, the land quality deteriorated and there were floods. Landslides followed. Some sold their land to palm oil plantations, the land became dry, and disasters followed.

Kristof concluded:

> If Kalimantan becomes one enormous palm oil plantation, we will be all finished. And it is actually happening. If people grow palm oil, results arrive faster than if they grow rubber, but there is ruin at the end. People are poor and they don't think – they are after fast results.
>
> I am 44 years old now. When I was a child, life was so different. I'd go to the river where fish was abundant. Now, the rivers are polluted and toxic. There are no fish any more. Everything is different. These palm oil plantations take all the water. Now there is hardly any water in the rivers and what is left is deadly toxic water. Those who are at least a little bit educated know that corruption has taken everything. They know that our island is ruined but the people have nothing.

In Ambon (in the Moluccas, population 1.5 million in 2010), which in 2011 was once again consumed by violence, a man recalled the dreadful religious clashes of 1999, which I had had the misfortune to witness and cover: 'In 1999, a friend of mine told me, "Gus, now the military will try to move the conflict from East Timor to Ambon." I didn't believe him at that time, but then the violence erupted.' Seemingly out of the blue, Muslims were fighting Christians while the military was exchanging fire with the police force.

Who instigated this conflict on this island, which, according to its residents, had been managing peaceful coexistence between two religions for decades? In 1999 I saw several churches burning, including the oldest one in the tiny settlement of Hila. I saw a young boy being hacked to death in front of my eyes, by a gang of arrogant youths who then proudly posed with their machetes in the air. Rioting and fire ruined large parts of the capital city. The rumours were that the conflict was imported from Java, but what is certain is that the people of Ambon have lost control over their senses and over their island.

The same stories resonate in Sumatra, in West Timor, all over Java and Sulawesi. How come people have no control over their islands, their wealth and the planning for the future? And where did all that wealth from the cut-down forests, from palm oil and rubber plantations go? Is it possible that it all disappeared into a few luxury malls of Jakarta, in the new marinas and private jets, in the columns of grotesque villas in Menteng, or in condominiums purchased in foreign cities by officials, generals and corrupt businessmen? Even

during the Suharto reign, there were hardly any private yachts and jets. Now there are hundreds, while the people of Indonesia are becoming poorer and poorer and the islands are devastated, stripped of everything. The elites seem to have lost all shame and all fear. The foreign and local media write of progress since Suharto stepped down, but the progress has been towards madness and absolute lack of accountability and lawlessness, towards absolute devastation of the archipelago.

'In a few days we will be celebrating our Independence Day', said Hermayani Putra:

> We will have to stand with our red and white flag. They will say to us 'Freedom!' I say, freedom, but from what? We have to ask the people from Aceh to Papua this question. Everybody has to be asked. Maybe, our people here in Kalimantan would not, at the end, opt for independence like those in Timor-Leste or Papua. But they know that they should be allowed to find their own solutions.

6

CORRUPTION KILLS

> In today's Indonesia, the family unit doesn't teach its children how to produce, only how to consume. The result is that people have forgotten how to produce because they don't produce anything any more, and when they can't produce, they become corrupt and try to corrupt others.
>
> Pramoedya Ananta Toer, in *Exile*

What is corrupt in Indonesia? Many would reverse the question and ask, what is not? Probably almost everybody would agree that personal interests are strangling the country. Logging and mining concessions are being sold under the table to private companies. Justice is for sale and so is the police force, even the army. Corruption-eradication organizations are not trusted. The religious bodies and institutions that are supposed to help the poor are corrupt too. So are public hospitals, schools and NGOs.

But the Indonesian elites and the government are unwilling to launch a determined assault on corruption. It is easy to understand why: the regime is based on fraud, which dates from 1965 and continues today. Millions, even billions, of dollars are made effortlessly by people's representatives and oligarchs, by judges, politicians and law enforcers. The victims are common Indonesians as well as their devastated islands, but to the feudal lords the victims amount to nothing.

At the upper level, everything is interconnected, united and secured against the impoverished majority. Tight networks connect the old elites (and their children) who used to serve the former Dutch and Japanese colonialists with the professors of the University of Indonesia who were 'educated' before 1965 using Ford Foundation funds (as well as their children and students), with the fraction of the military that committed treason and brought about the coup in 1965, and with the businesspeople who were elevated to the top by Suharto at gunpoint (you serve me and I will make you rich or you die) and with the promise of great easy gains and impunity. We should not forget that this clique includes foreign advisors, the media (local and foreign) serving business interests, and most of

the Indonesian 'intellectuals', who are 'funded' by foreign 'cultural institutions', foundations and governments.

Corruption kills millions of the poor, stalls the improvement of education, judicial reforms and social programmes, and the improvement of infrastructure and protection of the environment. It basically interferes with every aspect of life in Indonesia.

This interconnectedness of the problems is what Jakarta's image-makers and foreign advisers continue to dispute. The concept does not even enter the public debate. But it is the key to everything.

In 2004 Jorge Taiana, the deputy foreign minister of Argentina, uttered the famous words, 'Argentine society is convinced that the impunity of the army's crimes facilitated corruption and lack of respect for the rule of law.' Chile and Argentina put members of military juntas behind bars for much lesser crimes than those committed in Indonesia and its environs. Since then, both countries have been experiencing sustained economic growth that is benefiting the majority: their social systems have improved, the rule of law has been re-established and corruption has decreased dramatically (in Chile it is lower than in most EU countries, according to Transparency International).

Erry Riyana Hardjapamekas, chairman of the Independent Team of National Bureaucracy Reform, used to be the vice-chairman of KPK (the Corruption Eradication Commission) between 2003 and 2007. We met at Plaza Indonesia in Jakarta on October 15, 2011 and he delivered a passionate anti-corruption speech during the interview:

> Our main objective ought to be the fighting of corruption! Problems with human rights violations, poverty alleviation, healthcare and other issues – they all go back to corruption; they are connected. It is the number one enemy of Indonesia. To me corruption is even more dangerous than terrorism, because one could argue that even the terrorism is there because of the corruption.

Sitting at the same table was Allan Bell from the Department of Law of the University of Hong Kong, who is working in Indonesia, advising the government on asset recovery (basically on the recovery of billions of dollars that were taken abroad during the Suharto era and after). He blames the dysfunctional system and the 'feudal culture' for many problems Indonesia is facing. He also believes that corruption has become primarily a domestic problem:

> There is no question that multinational companies are playing a big role in corruption but they are here to make money …. There are more and more prosecutions in the West now, such as what happened with Siemens. But it's just like a slap on the wrist. Would they change how they do business? No. They would still bribe their way.

But even Bell is not sure to what extent the foreign companies add to the existing nightmare:

> They are certainly contributing to the existing issues. But it is hard to say if they are intensifying the problem. If you move all the foreign companies from here, the corruption is not going to disappear, not any more.

There seems to be very little, if any, appetite to follow the South American approach and connect the dots from the past: foreign interventions, military coups and the Friedman/von Hayek models and their freewheeling economic regimes, as well as the economic and social disaster they triggered. The main reason for such reluctance could be that the South American approach actually worked, moving countries back on track for social justice and away from feudalism.

SUHARTO – THE FATHER OF INDONESIAN CORRUPTION

In his brilliant and hilarious short story, 'The winding road to heaven,' Tongan writer Epeli Hau'ofa unwittingly gave a description that perfectly suited Indonesia:

> And not so long ago, when five very, very important men discovered that they had together helped themselves to half a million dollars of public money to which they had no right to help themselves, they prayed for God's forgiveness, they forgave each other, and they neither had to resign from their very important jobs nor return any money to anyone.

Of course, in Suharto's case it was not 'a pittance' of half a million dollars – it went up to tens of billions of dollars (no one can agree on the real number), making him the most corrupt leader in modern history.

'The World Bank is saying the number is somewhere between

US$15 and 25 billion,' Bell told me. 'But there are allegations that actually as much as US$65 billion was stolen.'

After Suharto's death in January 2008, the Western mainstream media rediscovered the zeal with which it had supported the Indonesian despot throughout his killing sprees of 1965–66 and his decades of plundering East Timor, Papua, Aceh and other parts of the archipelago. It was finally the Chinese media that gave his rule a fairly accurate, if low-key and gently sarcastic, assessment. The *People's Daily* commented on January 29, 2008:

> Tens of thousands of people lined the roads in Jakarta and around Solo in Central Java, hoping to catch a last glimpse of the man who came from a humble background but ruled his subjects like a Javanese king. The body was flown from the capital to Solo, then driven to the family mausoleum at Giribangun, 35 km northeast of the city, close to the burial grounds of Solo's kings.

Its coverage continued with a laconic quote of the paragraphs delivered tearfully by Suharto's eldest daughter, Siti Hardijanti Rukmana, at the funeral:

> Father is only human, who has weaknesses and strengths and is not exempted from mistakes. If he has done good, may Allah multiply the goodness. If he has made mistakes, may Allah forgive …. Ladies and gentlemen, if father has made any mistakes, please forgive him. Farewell father.

Suharto was forgiven by many rulers, present and former: by Malaysians, Singaporeans and Bruneians, by the entire top military brass of Indonesia, the business elites, the leaders of pro-business political parties, by foreign advisors based in Indonesia, by religious officials (after all, he did kill hundreds of thousands of 'atheists', and some Muslim and Hindu movements gave him a helping hand during the massacres), by most of the Western governments that had supported him from the beginning to the end, and by most of the mass media, at home as well as in almost all ASEAN countries, in the United States, Europe and Australia. As he was 'our despot', he died in peace and surrounded by kind words, in striking contrast to the departures of Saddam Hussein or Muammar Gaddafi, although they were comparatively much less evil and less corrupt. Above all, his entire outrageously corrupt family forgave him.

Like the most brutal and least enlightened kings, he left behind

no intellectual caste, no alternative interpretation of his reign and no organized opposition to the political and economic dogma which he imported from abroad.

After his departure, there were no persistent efforts to repatriate the billions stolen from his desperate nation. Or rather, as Bell says there were three executive orders, but these token efforts died through incompetence and lack of coordination between the state agencies. The dozens of Indonesians I asked did not know anything about the repatriation efforts: they saw it as none of their business.

Although most Indonesians have heard about Suharto's massive corruption, they were also told that during his time in power the economy improved: not to their benefit, of course, but in some abstract macroeconomic way. Some knew about the massacres in 1965–66, but this awareness was all but drowned by propaganda about the communist coup and how the army had saved the nation. The nation was well conditioned not to have any awareness about the genocide it committed in East Timor and it is committing in Papua – and this attempt at blindness was particularly diligent among the upper-middle classes and elites, who had and have full access to the foreign media and foreign travel.

Not only were Suharto and his family forgiven, SBY quietly decided not to take up the offer made by the United Nations and the World Bank to help Indonesia repatriate the billions of dollars that Suharto and his family had kept in foreign banks. If the Indonesian population consists of 237 million people (the official total, and as we have seen, probably a sizeable underestimate), and Suharto embezzled US$35 billion, that equates to US$147 per person and US$882 for an average family of six.

Of course, given the state of Indonesian corruption, even if it were recovered the money would never be given to the poor.

According to the United Nations and the World Bank, which at least to some extent joined forces in September 2007 in a Stolen Asset Recovery Initiative for developing countries,[1] Suharto topped the world's list of infamy for corruption and nepotism, well ahead of former Philippines president Ferdinand Marcos, former president of DRC Mobutu Sese Seko, and Sani Abacha of Nigeria. His official salary in 1998 – the year he was forced to resign after massive demonstrations that shook Jakarta – was only US$1,764 a month, but it has been claimed that he and his family amassed more than US$45 billion. The family is said to control some 36,000 sq km of real estate in Indonesia, including 100,000 sq m of prime office space in Jakarta.

But even to allude to such information can still be illegal in Indonesia. The UN and World Bank report was published in September 2007, just one week after Indonesia's Supreme Court ordered *Time* magazine to pay US$106 million in damages to the former dictator for accusing him of corruption in a 1999 article. Although the Supreme Court reversed the ruling in 2009, the message was clear.

Following his resignation, Suharto was charged with embezzling hundreds of millions of dollars of state funds, but the government quietly dropped the case on the grounds of his poor health. In 2007, state prosecutors filed a civil suit seeking to recover US$440 million of state funds and a further US$1 billion in damages for alleged misuse of funds held by one of Suharto's charitable foundations. SBY, who had risen as a general under the Suharto regime, instructed Attorney-General Hendarman Supandji to seek an out-of-court settlement since Suharto was then fighting for his life in Pertamina Hospital. (So too, in their slum homes, were the millions of poor people that he robbed.)

Like almost all mainstream Indonesian politicians, SBY has consistently refused to criticize Suharto openly. 'Pak Harto was a leader of this nation. His contributions to this nation are not small. As a human being, however, like other people, Pak Harto has weaknesses and mistakes,' he told Reuters on January 16, 2008, referring to Suharto by his endearing nickname.

The weekly news magazine *Tempo* – arguably the most influential in Indonesia, and once a reliable voice of the opposition – ran several articles sympathetic to Suharto in its January 15–21, 2008 issue. An unsigned 'Opinion piece' (the cover story) ended with these words:

> Suharto has lost the chance to explain that he does not own a cent overseas, as he has insisted many times. He has not had the opportunity to respond to accusations by the people he led for 31 years. We cannot turn back the clock. So what is the point of discussing something that is most unlikely? This is also not the time to negotiate a civil case against the former president. Let the man who is at the end of life's long journey have some peace.[2]

Since Suharto was hospitalized, not a single leading Indonesian political figure has dared to mention the former dictator's responsibility for the deaths of Indonesians. No demonstration shook Jakarta. There were no analyses that under his reign, one of the most

devastating pro-business and anti-people regimes in the world was put in place. The *Tempo* headline speaks of 'a chorus of forgiving voices', and the pressure is mounting to award Suharto the posthumous title of national hero.

MUD LAKE – TIP OF THE CORRUPTION ICEBERG?

> Indonesians call it Pompeii, or their own Ground Zero, a giant stinking lake of volcanic mud that has made 50,000 people homeless and relentlessly swallowed up villages, factories, schools, mosques and major transport arteries since it began bubbling out of the earth two years ago.
>
> The planet's largest mud volcano spews 125,000 cubic meters of methane-rich sludge a day, enough to fill 50 Olympic-sized swimming pools. Today, the mud covers nearly 1,600 acres and shows no sign of slowing, despite being dammed by hastily erected 6 m (20 ft) walls.

This is the beginning of a report written by me and by an Irish journalist and scholar David McNeill, lecturer at Sofia University in Tokyo.[3] The story is truly dreadful:

> At Besuki village, bordering the mud lake, the local people, made homeless by the eruption, stop passing cars to beg for money.
>
> Officially declared a natural disaster, seismologists and furious locals blame drilling by an oil and gas exploration company with connections to a billionaire government minister. The company, Lapindo Brantas, was drilling for oil 3,000 metres into the ground less than half a kilometre from crowded villages when the volcano erupted. A team of experts from the UK's Durham University who investigated the site concluded that the drilling penetrated a water-filled aquifer beneath a sea of mud, sending a pressurised mix of both to the surface.
>
> The team's leader Prof. Richard Davies said he was '99 percent certain' that the drilling triggered the eruption. Private compensation claims are crawling through the Indonesian courts, but few of the poor victims can afford the legal fees.
>
> Lapindo Brantas is owned by the family of welfare minister Aburizal Bakrie, listed in 2007 as Indonesia's richest man by *Forbes* magazine with a total fortune of about $9 billion. The minister and his family's company have grown rich on the back of rising global commodity and energy prices, particularly of coal.

Photo 6.1 Part of the mud lake which inundated several villages in the subdistrict of Porong, Sidoarjo, East Java, after a mud volcano erupted in 2006, as a result of the blowout of a natural gas well drilled by PT Lapindo Brantas

Critics say the minister's political connections have saved him from stronger government demands for compensation.

PT Bumi Resources, Indonesia's largest mining company, owned by the Bakrie family, has seen its share price increase 400 per cent over the past year as global demand for coal has surged, according to *GlobeAsia* magazine.

Only a fraction of the victims got any compensation, although all of them were promised help. Those who did received 1,500 dollars, around 20 per cent of what was originally promised by the company, according to the victims we interviewed at the site several months after the tragedy. And part of it had to be handed to the group of former officials who are representing victims – many of them illiterate – in courts.

The Lapindo case is typical, but it is only one among thousands of cases where the victims – the overwhelming majority of them poor – can count on no justice, no legal protection, and no help from the government.

SBY refused to fire the welfare minister Aburizal Bakrie. Or, maybe, he would not dare to embarrass the richest man in the country.

Corruption is everywhere, especially even in the conflict zones. In their report on West Papua, John Wing and Peter King argue that:

> A 'culture of impunity' exists in Indonesia which sees its highest manifestation currently in Papua and Aceh. Military operations have led to thousands of deaths in Papua and continue to cost lives, yet the Republic's armed forces act as a law unto themselves with no real accountability for crimes against the Papuan population. The report discusses a number of areas of Indonesian security forces involvement, including: illegal logging and corrupt infrastructure and construction work; destabilization and manipulation of local politics, and orchestration of attacks blamed on pro-Papuan independence groups; the introduction of illegal arms and militia training and recruitment; and prostitution and the spread of HIV/AIDS.[4]

In its 2010 Corruption Perception Index, the Berlin-based Transparency International (TI) ranked Indonesia as number 110 out of 180 nations and territories surveyed (1 is the least corrupt nation, 180 the most). But many experts and citizens consider this standing far too lenient and politicized. Recently released analyses by TI itself indicate that 'the fight against corruption' in Indonesia has hit a dead end. Corruption is in everything and everywhere, from the police force and the military to the government.

'I think the Western establishment is too lenient towards Indonesia', explained Erry Riyana Hardjapamekas:

> Some foreign organizations are trying to see Indonesia as the country that is awakening from totalitarianism and marching towards democracy, also as a supplier of natural resources. But such an approach is actually very counter-productive and damaging to the country. On the index of TI, Indonesia should be way below the 110 ranking that it was given.

Although well below China, Thailand and Malaysia, the TI ranking puts Indonesia a few places above the communist Vietnam, which is actually dramatically improving the standard of living of the majority of its citizens. It remains an open question to what extent the corruption perception indices are objective or politically driven. It also appears that TI relies too much on data provided by local organizations and individuals, which in the case of Indonesia are not always reliable sources.

Photo 6.2 Former President Abdurrahman Wahid, known in Indonesia as 'Gus Dur'. Photo taken in 2006 in his office at Kramat Raya.

'Indonesia has overtaken Cambodia as the most corrupt country in the Asia-Pacific region in the eyes of business executives, according to an annual survey by Political & Economic Risk Consultancy, a Hong Kong-based risk analysis firm', reported the *Jakarta Globe* on March 8, 2010.

'From what I see here, it is obvious that Vietnam is much less corrupt than Indonesia', said Etty Sambodo, visitor to Hoi An in central Vietnam and writer for radio programmes in Cikeas, Indonesia. 'Even if the Vietnamese system is corrupt, the people here can enjoy many more public facilities than in Indonesia, and the Vietnamese cities are neat, clean and full of public areas.'

In Indonesia, people who fight corruption are themselves often accused of the vice they are supposed to eradicate. Those who

remain true to their principles are frequently set up, blackmailed and destroyed in open acts of vengeance.

Indonesia missed a true opportunity to reform when it allowed its progressive president and moderate Muslim cleric Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) to be forced out of power in 2001. Arguably a closet socialist and secularist, Wahid explained to me on several occasions in private, and also publicly on camera, his opposition to the savage Indonesian capitalist system. In my film *Terlena,* he apologized to the communists and declared that capitalism has to be reformed. Predictably, the economic, political and military elites closed ranks against him and began the drive to oust him from power.

Wahid ordered SBY, who was then the coordinating minister for politics and security, to declare a state of emergency. SBY disobeyed, showing allegiance to the elites instead of to his president. The army placed tanks in front of the Presidential Palace. Eventually, under tremendous pressure, President Wahid was forced to resign in what could easily be described as a coup. The official story was that he had been driven out because of – corruption! A man who fought the corrupt establishment was forced to resign because of charges that seemed to me, and many, to be ludicrous.

'Gus Dur [Wahid] used funds from the State Logistic Agency to help one of his close friends. He was being used by opportunists around him,' explained Ryaas Rasyid, who served as state minister under Wahid and is now a member of SBY's Advisory Board. 'Wahid described openly what he did, during the questioning by the chief of National Police. He was not aware of the consequences of his order and he had no idea about the rules of state money management.'

I asked Rasyid whether Megawati or SBY would have survived if the same standards had been applied and their conduct had been scrutinized as much as that of Wahid. 'They could not have survived,' was his answer.

SOME EXAMPLES OF CORRUPTION CASES

There are literally hundreds of thousands of cases of corruption every year, big and small, but a few examples captured the imagination of the nation.

One was the (as yet unresolved) Bank Century bailout scandal in 2008, which *Indonesia Matters* described like this:

> The scandal that has become known as 'Centurygate' revolves around not only the massive drain on state funds involved, but

> questions of whether some depositors (such as tycoon Boedi Sampoerna) had preferential treatment or access to their funds after the bailout money had been injected, and whether some of the money was diverted and embezzled.[5]

In June 2009 an Indonesian court sentenced an in-law of SBY's to four and a half years in jail. Aulia Pohan, former deputy of the Indonesian Central Bank, was found guilty of approving illegal payments (of US$11.1 million) to members of parliament. He was also ordered to pay the ridiculously low fine of US$20,000, and was predictably released to 'conditional freedom' in 2010.

Probably the juiciest case was a corruption scandal in 2006, when it was proved that Said Agil Munawar, former minister of religious affairs, had helped to embezzle some US$76 million from the funds designated for sending pilgrims to *hajj*. He was sentenced to five years in prison. He served only two years and was released on parole in 2008.

Muhammad Nazaruddin was a treasurer of the Democratic Party. He and several party members were allegedly involved in rigging a tender for the government contract worth Rp191.7 billion (US$22.5 million) to build an athletes' village for the upcoming SEA Games in Palembang.

IF YOU ARE CORRUPT, GO ALL THE WAY

Apparently, if you decide to be corrupt, it is best to aim at embezzling millions or billions, so that you can pay your way out of trouble later. Tatang Rustandi, former head of Bappeda Bandung (the Regional Planning and Development Board) explained the concept:

> Now officials use the principle that if they are corrupt, it shouldn't be half way – it has to be big so that there would be plenty of money to pay off auditors and law enforcement. We have a lousy Auditors' Body. Some young auditors are still idealistic, but their superiors can be bought; they even name the price.[6]

'In Indonesia, corruption that had been evolving for more than 30 years during *Orba* [Suharto's 'New Order'] is no longer only a system but a culture,' declared Hendardi, during our long coffee session at the Coffee Club in Jakarta. 'Also, we can't eradicate corruption with the silent and complacent society. Our middle class

is supporting the status quo as it is too spoiled and comfortable and doesn't want to surrender its privileges for the sake of the majority of the people.'

The culture of corruption is plundering the nation from top to bottom. According to most of the surveys, the most corrupt institutions in the country are the parliament, the judiciary and the police. The police are extorting money at the intersections and during *razias* (raids). Most people don't report crime any more.

Hendardi concluded:

> One of the biggest problems during the New Order was corruption, including corruption in law enforcement. Many countries went through a transition, but they didn't become worse like Indonesia, because their legal institutions were not contaminated with corruption. Here, we have corruption in the courts and in the police. The police take action here only when it is paid for.
>
> Justice can easily be bought; at the police station, the district attorney's office or at the court. People are reluctant to approach police because as they say here, 'if we lose a chicken they will take a cow'. Recently, in the court, there was a case when people threw shoes at the judge because they had paid him but the verdict went to the opposing party, which had probably paid even more. People don't believe in justice any more.

Corruption has triggered a terrible mood in Indonesian society. People are afraid to talk, suspicious of each other. There are factions everywhere, but no unity and no determination to rebuild the collapsing nation. There are speculations but no proof, general accusations but hardly any investigative reporting.

Why is smoking not banned even from streets leading to schools, or in restaurants and malls? Why is the tobacco industry a sponsor of sport events? Why are there hardly any sidewalks and public transportation while the government is issuing licences for new scooters and cars when the cities are choking? Why are there hardly any public projects?

Most people are reluctant to speak; others are becoming brave, accusing the regime with desperate determination. 'Corruption in Indonesia is well planned', said Bambang Wisono, a consultant from Bandung:

> I was a *Broker anggaran* [a budget arbitrator] for three years. The

> heads of regencies – the regents – would contact me with their programmes, asking for my assistance to put together a budget for the programmes to be approved by DPRD (the House of Regional Representatives) and DPR (the House of Representatives). When regents proposed their budgets, they had already calculated illegal percentages for themselves and the lawmakers.
>
> Scrutiny did not help. It only led to the halt of infrastructural and tangible projects as corrupt officials realized that if they took their cuts – even 20 per cent – it would be obvious in the result. So now they don't build any more, preferring to deal with the projects related to social assistance and grants. They can easily steal 50 per cent of such budgets.[7]

Officials could face a firing squad if they were found guilty of this kind of deal in China or Vietnam, but of course not in Indonesia.

7

THE ENVIRONMENT, PLUNDERING OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND CONSEQUENT NATURAL DISASTERS

In 2006, the United Nations described Indonesia as the most disaster-prone nation in the world, taking away this sad title from Bangladesh and India. The country suffers from tsunamis, earthquakes, landslides and terrible floods. Tens of thousands of lives are often lost in one single year from natural disasters, making life in Indonesia as dangerous as in some countries suffering from wars. The question is, is nature solely to blame for these disasters? The disasters of recent years – the terrible tsunami in Aceh in December 2004, the tsunami that devastated Mentawai Island, the central Java earthquake and the eruption of Mt Merapi – further illustrate the lack of preparedness on the part of government.

Desperate communities of scavengers have been buried under the stinking content of illegal garbage dumps. Landslides are carrying carton-like houses into ravines; earthquakes and tidal waves are destroying coastal cities and villages. Forest fires from Sumatra are choking huge areas of Southeast Asia.

The scope of the disasters is unprecedented, and it is absurd to discount them simply as nation's bad luck, or to blame them on the wrath of the gods or on nature. Corruption, incompetence and the simple indifference of the ruling elites and government officials are mostly to blame. It is poverty, lack of public projects and kleptomania that kill hundreds of thousands of desperate Indonesian men, women and children.

Some of these disasters are human-made; almost all of them are preventable. At closer scrutiny, it becomes obvious that people die because of the almost non-existent preventive measures and the prevalence of the savage pro-market economic system, which allows the enrichment of very few at the expense of the majority who live on under US$2 a day. The conclusions can be terrifying, casting light on the way the present-day Indonesian society functions. However, to avoid making this analysis and exposing the problems would

doubtless lead to the further loss of the precious lives of hundreds of thousands of people.

Earthquakes alone do not kill people. Poor construction of houses and buildings is the main culprit, together with the lack of preventive measures and preventive education. It is a well-known fact that Indonesia is prone to natural disasters; that it is located on the 'Pacific ring of fire'. But it is in this country that the poor cannot count on massive public housing projects (like those which are taken for granted in the neighbouring Malaysia), which could withstand earthquakes. Almost each family is on its own: it has to design and build its own dwelling. Major earthquakes kill hundreds, sometimes thousands of people, leaving hundreds of thousands more homeless. At least 5,800 people died and 36,000 were injured on May 27, 2006, during the 6.3-magnitude quake that hit central Java near the historic city of Yogyakarta. The primitive infrastructure, inadequate medical facilities and corruption in the distribution of aid are to blame for the unacceptably high number of casualties after each major tremor.

Illegal logging and deforestation are the main reasons for the landslides. It is well known who is responsible for the forest fires in Sumatra and elsewhere, but officials are reluctant to make arrests, as those responsible for deforestation are often rich or part of the military, therefore they are well connected in a country where justice is openly for sale. There are countless solutions to these problems, including law enforcement, inspections and attempts to provide alternative means of livelihood to those communities that are so desperate that they are effectively forced to participate in digging their own graves by destroying the environment. But almost nothing is done, as illegal logging is a huge and lucrative business that can grease hundreds of willing palms.

Dozens of people are killed every month. In the landslides and flash floods of 2006 in the north of Sumatra Island, some 400,000 people were forced to flee their homes. In June 2006, floods and landslides triggered by heavy rains killed more than 200 people in south Sulawesi province.

One of Indonesia's worst disasters was the tidal wave (or tsunami) that killed up to 250,000 people in Aceh in December 2004. Not only was the response of the Indonesian government and military inexcusably slow and inadequate, a large part of the massive foreign aid disappeared in corruption. Instead of helping the victims, many members of the Indonesian military extorted bribes from relief agencies, and destroyed precious supplies of drinking water and food when bribes were not paid.

Many victims of another tsunami, which hit the coast of southern Java on July 17, 2006, had to wait for years for any substantial help. According to the official count 600 people died, but the real number was almost certainly much higher. Indonesian officials received early warnings from Japan but refused to act on them. Later they claimed there was not much they could have done, as the area was not equipped with sirens or loudspeakers.

Indonesia often suffers from human-made disasters beyond any comprehension and comparison. A 'mud flood' inundated entire villages right outside Surabaya (see page 144). It was probably caused by the inadequate safety procedures of a gas exploration company (which is co-owned by a cabinet minister). Garbage buried entire communities of poor scavengers at an illegal dumping site outside Bandung. There are many more cases of a similar nature, but a complete list would require too much space – probably an entire book dedicated to the subject.

The Indonesian press and mass media do report each and every disaster in detail. But they are failing to look below the surface and draw attention to the role of human beings in these disasters. They do not bring it out that what is happening is extraordinary and intolerable; that there is probably no other major country in the world that has experienced, and continues to experience such unnecessary and devastating loss of human lives, for reasons that are connected to its socio-economic system. Any attempt to draw out the links between the losses of life, corruption and the socio-economic system is determinedly discouraged.

Between December 2004 and December 2006 alone, Indonesia lost around 300,000 people in various calamities. (This is not counting the deaths in car accidents and the military conflicts that were raging all over the archipelago.) This is more than Iraq lost in the same period of time, more than Sri Lanka or Peru lost during their long civil wars. Indeed, many Indonesians are experiencing a life that is as dangerous and hazardous as in war-torn parts of the world. Most of them don't realize it, as comparative statistics are not available or are suppressed.

On May 3, 2007, Reuters reported:

> Indonesia had the fastest pace of deforestation in the world between 2000 and 2005, with an area of forest equivalent to 300 soccer pitches destroyed every hour, Greenpeace said …
>
> 'The next generation of Indonesians will not see any forest if no action is taken by the government to deal with the problem,'

Greenpeace Indonesia forest campaigner Bustar Maitar told a news conference.

The *Guinness Book of World Records* has approved a proposal by Greenpeace that Indonesia's forest destruction be included in its 2008 record book, to be published in September this year, said Greenpeace Southeast Asia campaigner Hapsoro.

Displaying a replica of the certificate from the global authority of records, he said the citation from the publication would read: 'Of the 44 countries which collectively account for 90 per cent of the world's forests, the country which pursues the highest annual rate of deforestation is Indonesia with 1.8 million hectares (4.4 million acres) of forest destroyed each year between 2000–2005.'

FILTH AND POLLUTION

By many standards, Indonesia is one of the dirtiest countries worldwide. What is officially the dirtiest river in the world – the Citarum – passes near the capital. Floating garbage tightly covers the entire surface of the waterway, making it look more like an enormous garbage dump – which in reality it is. But the Citarum is not the only waterway in Indonesia that is in this terrible state. All waterways on Java and the other islands are extremely polluted, carrying both industrial waste and garbage from the households along their banks.

On October 17, 2011, the *Jakarta Globe* carried an article, 'Experts say riverbank defecation costs Indonesia $6.6 billion yearly', which revealed some shocking data:

> 'The problem is not limited to low-income residents …. Fifty-five per cent of all households don't have access to clean water, while the same percentage don't have a proper sanitation system, which leads them to dump their waste untreated,' according to Oswar Mungkasa, the head of planning and budgeting at the Public Housing Ministry.

How can the Indonesian state consider that only around 13 per cent of the people are poor when more than half of them have no access to clean water and to proper sanitation?

Not only on remote islands, but also in Jakarta and its suburbs, the banks of canals and rivers are dotted with slums. Wooden shacks hanging over the water are used as toilets. Polluted, filthy water is

used for washing clothes, and in many cases for washing dishes and for drinking after being boiled.

The country has no effective waste management system, even in Jakarta. There are no garbage trucks here, like those that are now seen even in some big African cities. Trash is picked up by barefoot coolies, pushing ancient carts with wooden wheels through the streets and alleyways. It is then burned, right in the middle of residential neighbourhoods. The stench and smog add to the already high level of air pollution.

Open sewage is the norm, both in the cities and in the countryside. The problem is that because of the volume of garbage in the sewers, the canals and sewage ducts do not even empty into the sea: every one is clogged.

Living its extreme capitalist dream (or more precisely nightmare), Indonesia has been performing a miracle – dispensing with everything public. Public transportation is another of the casualties. Instead of an efficient and environmentally sound system, transport in Jakarta is by private cars and scooters, or filthy and smog-belching 'buses' and minivans (just minivans are found everywhere else).

There are no facilities to measure air pollution, or soil and water contamination. It appears that the level of pollution in the cities, as well as chemical contamination of fields and waterways, is a form of national secret.

THE RIVER MUSI AND PALEMBANG, SUMATRA

Open tin mines like enormous festering wounds dominate the landscape of Bangka Island, near Sumatra, and only a 40 minute flight from Jakarta. Even from the air it is obvious that the island is a textbook example of human-made environmental calamity. Only a few tiny pockets of natural forest remain, surrounded by rubber and palm oil plantations.

When I was en route to the eastern part of the island from the airport, my driver explained diffidently, 'Mining companies don't give much back to this island. The government built one decent hospital here. But that's about it and the people have no say about what happens on this island.'

Bangka, home to around 650,000 people, is known for its white beaches, but those are now covered by garbage and basically unfit for tourism. Most of the beaches exhibit the latest 'cultural trend': affluent young people and families bring their cars and scooters to the seafront and drive back and forth on the sand, until late in the

evening. Silence – once the last attraction of the island – has gone, replaced by the roar of engines. The beach, which features fantastic rock structures, is now badly polluted.

Just a few miles across the sea from Bangka, I took a dilapidated hydrofoil (from a fleet, one of which recently sank) that sailed into the magnificent Sungai Musi, one of the mighty rivers of Sumatra Island. While I was admiring the surface of the river from the boat, a local student suggested that I look between the trees linking the riverbank. 'Try to catch the moment – the opening. You will see: behind these trees, there is nothing left of the forest.' One hour later, this black-smoke and pop-music-belching craft docked at the city of Palembang.

With 1.5 million inhabitants, Palembang is the second largest city of Sumatra and one of the most populous in Indonesia. It is also one of the most appalling urban centres on the Asian continent. There is hardly anything on offer to the visitor, except for a handful of Dutch-era buildings and several picturesque traditional houses on stilts. (These are mostly inhabited by the very poor.) There is also a not very impressive bridge built by the Japanese. The city's entire social life centres on the enormous French Novotel hotel, built like a fortress, and the adjacent shopping mall. Although located some 80 km from the coast, Palembang is a vast port, with huge vessels docked at the banks and in the middle of the Musi River. The river and the streams that feed it are not just polluted, they appear to be positively toxic.

You can see the carcasses of dogs and other animals afloat on the river, together with industrial waste, bottles and other household waste. Palembang again has no public transportation, except for corroded and polluting minivans and a few decomposing buses. It is home to oil refineries, as well as cement and fertiliser plants. It sits in the middle of two major areas of unbridled deforestation on Sumatra. While Indonesia is often referred to as the Ground Zero of climate change, Palembang should be considered one of its most telling monuments.

Isna Wijayani is a professor of journalism at the Faculty of Social and Political Science–Communication Department, University Baturaja, Sumatra. Hers is one of the few outspoken voices in this part of the world:

> Illegal loggers can usually count on backing from the police, military, local government officials and thugs. The media only covers raids against the loggers, that is, if there are raids. Even

Photo 7.1 Logged-out rainforest on the bank of the River Musi, 30 km from Palembang, South Sumatra

> then it is very rare that journalists cover them on their own, as they are usually short of funds and can't just go up or down the river as they please. On this, as well as many other topics, there is news hegemony and no diversity in contents. The local journalists dare not take risks. Journalists in Palembang only look for easy news and if they have been 'serviced' (bribed), bad or critical news will not be published. Money talks here, even when it comes to the news.[1]

Logging is considered a 'very dangerous topic' to cover, and the local press would never dare to go into uncomfortable details. It is widely known that police and the military are involved in lucrative illegal logging operations.

There are plenty of alarming reports by local academics and international observers about the archipelago's disappearing rainforests and the unbearable pollution levels in all major Indonesian cities. But there are few sound analyses that link all the factors that make Indonesia environmentally one of the most battered nations on earth: corruption, government incompetence, the powerful position

of the armed forces, and the unbridled pursuit of profits, utilizing the easiest and often unsustainable means.

The usual restraint was broken for once when the *Jakarta Globe* reprinted an AFP report on January 29, 2010:

> The Indonesian military is deeply involved in the trade in illegally felled timber that is destroying vast tracts of pristine forest and contributing to global warming, researchers said Friday. The report comes days after the government revealed plans to ask foreign governments to contribute to a billion-dollar 'green investment fund' to help it cut greenhouse gas emissions through sustainable infrastructure projects. Environmentalists argue that the government could go a long way towards meeting its target of cutting emissions by 26 per cent from 2005 levels by 2020 simply by stopping rampant, unchecked illegal logging. But the new study by the Center for East Asia Cooperation Studies (CEACoS) at the University of Indonesia has revealed how difficult this could be given the military's involvement in the illicit trade. CEACoS executive director Tirta N. Mursitama, the head researcher in the project, said the military acted as a coordinator, investor, facilitator and middleman for the illegal loggers.

This report centred on the forest bordering Malaysia in East Kalimantan/Borneo, but the situation is similar in the rest of the country, including Sumatra. Given the combination of state controls and the silence of the media, the public remains largely uninformed about the environmental and social disasters that are devastating their country.

Despite the pollution, the River Musi is still one of the mightiest waterways of Southeast Asia. The human misery that can be seen along this waterway is on a par with some of the poorest parts of Africa. The tiny villages and towns along its shores seem lost in time, and are often cut off from the rest of the country.

Upang town is built on stilts. It is an expensive one-hour boat ride from Palembang at breakneck speed. Speedboats between Bangka Island and Palembang do not stop here. The town survives by supplying riverboats with fuel and food. Upang's children are able to study only until the ninth grade: the closest high school is in Palembang, and is unreachable for the great majority of the inhabitants.

'Each household has people who work across the river on cleared land,' explained Linda, on my visit to Upang in November 2009. She

had no idea how many households there are in Upang. 'People from the entire area are working on cleared land, and many are doing the clearing itself. There are no permits necessary and no taxes; nobody checks.'

Suddenly it started to rain. The sound of the tropical downpour was overwhelming as it struck the metal sheets of the roof of the store. I was visiting. The old cargo boats on the river looked like phantoms, and the other shore of the river disappeared from sight.

Linda and her friend Yanti explained that their monthly income was Rp20,000 to 30,000, approximately US$2.30–3.50 at the present exchange rate.

'Here we only wait for weddings', explained Yanti. 'At least something happens during weddings. There is music and food. My dream is to become rich. If I were rich, I would give alms (*zakat*) and then travel – I would go to Bandung and to Jakarta. I would visit the National Monument.' Neither girl had ever left Upang – not even to visit Palembang, 25 miles up the river.

The girls had no knowledge about deforestation. They knew it only as 'clearing the land', something good for planting rice and palm oil. They had no idea about global warming. We asked the same question of several people along the Musi River and we always received the same response, of incomprehension and bewilderment.

Rural Indonesia is extremely poor and underdeveloped, and people's lives are focused on survival. Moral and ethical questions here are simply perceived as odd. Caring for the environment and the world are luxuries most impoverished Indonesians cannot afford, and those who get rich on the plunder do not live in Upang.

As we sailed across the river and then slowly progressed towards Palembang, the full horror of the deforestation became apparent. Hundreds of square miles of rain forest have been destroyed and replaced by tremendous bare plains. Some areas were still burning. There were bags with chemicals and bottles of spray scattered all over the ground. You did not need to be an expert on the environment to see this as an unbridled, gross and brutal rape of nature.

As the banks of the river are slightly elevated, it is not easy to see the onslaught against the forest. It is necessary to enter one of the small lagoons by boat and then find your way through the swampy banks in order to see the full scale of the devastation.

At one of the epicentres of the disaster, at Sawah Upang, we spotted an old couple sitting in front of their house. They waved and happily explained their presence: 'We are from Palembang. Five

years ago we bought the land here from other people from Upang. Now we have our rice fields here.'

Deforestation? Global warming? They both smiled, not comprehending our questions.

On the way back to Palembang it began to rain, and this time the rain was heavy and continuous. Huge rusty cargo ships were again anchored in mid-river like tremendous ghosts, while the factory chimneys regurgitated colourful smoke skywards, even in the downpour. Streams brought brown and foamy liquid into the river. All around were misery, dirt and hopelessness – so common in today's Indonesia, but here somehow brought to the extreme.

The country has already lost over 70 per cent of its intact ancient forests, and half of what is left is threatened by commercial logging, forest fires and clearances for palm oil plantations. And the greed seems to know no boundaries.

No matter how pressing they are, the environmental issues cannot be separated from the general and continuous decay of the Indonesian state – its endemic corruption, the impunity of the armed forces, the extreme breed of market fundamentalism and the faith in the future that transcends rational thinking. Nothing can change until all of this changes.

NORTH SUMATRA

'The situation is very bad and getting worse', said Swiss zoologist Regina Frey, co-founder of legendary Bohorok Orang-utan Rehabilitation Center. We were sitting on the wooden terrace of the park ranger's station, with a small waterfall behind us, and a clean and playful river in front. All around was the deep forest of the Gunung Leuser National Park (a UNESCO-designated World Heritage site). It was almost unimaginable that just a few kilometres away, logging fuelled by the palm oil industry and rubber plantations was in full swing, and that the rest of the great Sumatran rain forests is disappearing at an enormous speed.

Frey continued:

> Certain companies that are not members of round table discussions are cutting down virgin forest and planting palm oil trees. It is happening in Aceh, at Leuser Ecosystem, at Peat swamp forest. The situation is extremely urgent – there are almost no virgin forests left in all Sumatra, except in a few reserves. The little that is left is being cut down as we speak. And with millions of

> dollars they receive every year from the international community, officials don't even bother to establish sound boundaries between the logging areas and protected parks. For instance here – at Leuser Eco System – there is no legal system of boundaries. And in Aceh they are giving concessions to the companies – declaring that the land is agricultural and therefore could accommodate both logging and palm oil plantations. Some of these deals go back to the Suharto era, and the government of Aceh does nothing about them. Since Suharto stepped down there has been no improvement whatsoever.[2]

To see Sumatra from an airplane is to discover that this once pristine part of the world – famed for its impenetrable tropical forests and mighty rivers, inhabited by thousands of species of wild, and often rare, animals – is now nothing more than an enormous enterprise designed to utilize everything of commercial value for export or domestic consumption. Those in charge of logging, mining and planting palm oil and rubber trees are totally indifferent to the future of the island. No sentiment is shown and no importance is given to sustainability – to the survival of the forest, and of the entire species (including the Sumatran tiger, which is now facing extinction, and the orang-utan) on this island, or even of the planet as a whole.

When I drove from Gunung Leuser to Medan (the capital of North Sumatra), the situation appeared to be utterly bleak. There were enormous palm oil plantations everywhere, with metal barriers closing entire areas on both sides of the road. Everything seemed to be privatized – there was almost nothing left for the nation and its people. The only public areas appeared to be the narrow streets of the villages and towns, most of them without sidewalks.

The land is injured and it is fighting back. Massive landslides, taking away hundreds of human lives, are common here and in the rest of the country.

Bukit Lawang, a small town at the entrance to Gunung Leuser National Park, was devastated on November 2, 2003 by a flash flood that was effectively caused by illegal logging. Four hundred houses, three mosques and 35 hotels were destroyed. There were 239 deaths, including those of five foreign travellers. The logging companies took no responsibility for the tragedy. It was only after the intervention of international cooperation agencies that the town was rebuilt. It reopened to the world in July 2004.

Now all along the road, I saw white sandbags designed to reinforce the destroyed hillsides.

Next to one of the intersections, a crowd of elderly men had gathered. They were smoking *kretek* cigarettes and discussing life. One of them told me, 'The existence of this plantation brings jobs to the locals, although we know that it also brings destruction to the environment.' Another added, 'Plantation triggers landslides. So we have mixed feelings: we are happy that we get jobs here, but sad because the environment suffers.'

A few minutes further towards Medan, I came across an enormous logging operation that was 'clearing' tens of square kilometres. There was a row of small eateries frequented by the workers, and several sex workers were aggressively shouting at the men there. This site belongs to PT. LN Kepong.

'This company is bad news for all of us here,' explained Mr Ginting:

> We used to be employed by PTP [a state-owned plantation]. We were paid salaries and also were getting pension benefits. But then the state sold the plantation to this Malaysian company and all of us got fired. Instead we were offered two-year contracts. So everything is on a contractual basis now. We don't get retirement benefits any more; there are no benefits at all.

Before leaving Medan and North Sumatra, we drove to Kampung Belawan, near the biggest Sumatran seaport. All of Kampung Belawan is built on stilts, and located on what was once a mangrove swamp. Now only stumps are left, surrounded by garbage and indescribable pollution. This large village has no basic hygienic facilities. The misery was shocking, even by African or South Asian standards.

The children of Kampung Belawan were typical examples of the situation in the Indonesian countryside. I saw pimples and pus on their faces and bodies. Many inhabitants – both children and adults – are ill.

The environmental impact of the destroyed mangrove swamp was not the main preoccupation here, just as the loss of the rainforest was not something people outside Medan were thinking about. As long as they can make a living cutting down the trees, they will do it. They will do anything to survive. Polluted rivers and the coasts are not issues that the fishermen can afford to think about; they have to feed their families and therefore they sell the fish they catch, even if it is contaminated.

ACEH AFTER THE TSUNAMI

In the hours after the giant tidal wave killed more than 200,000 people on December 26, 2004, the government of Indonesia made no coordinated effort to launch a massive rescue and relief operation. Only six transport C-130 airplanes were mobilized, and even these were not ordered to take off immediately. (Banda Aceh airport was damaged, but not the one in Medan, from where aid could have been transported by land.)

The situation on the ground was terrible, even – or especially – a few weeks after the disaster. There was no 'Ground Zero' in Banda Aceh – no single point that could be defined as the epicentre of the disaster. The tremendous wave had levelled entire neighbourhoods to the ground. Closer to the coast, what remained of the city had a striking resemblance to the old black and white photographs of Hiroshima after the devastating atom bomb.

People were confused and in obvious shock, cautiously returning, searching for bodies. In the neighbourhood of Peukan Bada, the smell of decomposing flesh was unbearable. Bodies were everywhere, buried under the rubble and dead trees, or simply floating in the stale water. After a month in the water, the bodies were unrecognizable. Their flesh was almost gone, and a hardened layer of skin was tightly hugging the skeletons.

Bodies – some in yellow and blue plastic bags, others exposed to the sun – were resting on the bottom of deep pits. Hundreds of mass graves had not yet been filled in. Heavy equipment – bulldozers, excavators, and trucks – was idly parked just a few metres away. There seemed to be no lack of machinery or fuel, but almost no organized effort to put it to use.

Instead of declaring a national state of emergency and mobilizing private airliners and ships for a relief operation in Aceh, the government advised citizens to 'pray for the victims'. Jusuf Kalla, vice-president and then newly elected head of the Golkar Party (the same political force as ruled the country during Suharto's dictatorship), decided to use the precious space in C-130 planes to fly in 'volunteers' – his supporters from several religious movements like MMI/Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (the Indonesian Mujaheedin Council) and FPI (the Islamic Defenders Front). Doctors were asked to leave the planes so he could make this political gesture.

Maulana Ibrahim, a youth leader from Aceh, assessed the work of these volunteers:

> We saw hundreds of volunteers coming to Aceh just days after the disaster. They arrived from Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and even Pontianak. Almost all of them were amateurs, unable to work in extreme conditions. They themselves were depressed and horrified, unable to lift the spirits of local victims. Some doctors couldn't handle these conditions and abandoned their post after two days. The government gave them no maps; they did not know where to go, did not know the names of the districts …. Logistically, their presence was a total disaster.[3]

Mr Asraw, coordinator of PCC (the People's Crisis Center, arguably the most active humanitarian NGO in Aceh), described the volunteers from Jakarta as: 'people who complicated the situation even further'.

> They were taking photographs of dead bodies, looking like tourists. Others just puked and left the scene. Some volunteers were just government spies, although after the Martial Law, one would wonder why the government needed even more of them …. My conclusion: most of the volunteers did close to nothing ….
>
> It's not only that government forces did almost nothing. In many cases they were preventing aid from reaching the refugees. We know about corruption cases, like the one in PEMDA, district of Dewantara in North Aceh, where the local government, instead of giving urgently needed aid to refugees, passed it to the local military commander. Even here in Banda Aceh, the military was selling aid supplies through *warungs* [local shops]. The PCC office was visited by the military on several occasions – they were demanding food and water. They were very rude. Once, our worker asked them to fill out the papers – a normal procedure. The soldiers got angry and began kicking and destroying huge, and then so precious, bottles of water. [4]

Those who suffered were mostly poor Acehnese. Natural gas and oil production (controlled mainly by multinational companies) suffered almost no disruption. 'It's remarkable', commented Deddy Afidick, an executive of Exxon-Mobil, in his luxury villa far away from the disaster area, in Banda Aceh. He welcomed me with a big smile: 'Our oil-fields suffered no damage. We can speak about zero damage! And the same goes for our friends at LNG – no destruction at all.'[5]

Aceh as a Special Autonomy Region

The coastal road outside Banda Aceh was built by the US Agency for International Development (USAID). Many here believe its sole purpose was to facilitate further plunder of Aceh's natural resources. It links Banda Aceh with the huge French-owned cement factory Lafarge Cement Indonesia and the mining business PT Lhoong Setia Mining, plus other mining and logging sites further away. Much of the surface is now smooth, almost perfect. But to build this thoroughfare, mountains were blown up. The scars will never go away.

Mr Maarif, a representative of the regional PRA political party explained:

> After the tsunami, the people of Aceh accepted foreign aid because they were in great need. But there were, naturally, very serious consequences. With the aid, they also had to accept the presence of organizations that were building roads, bridges and other infrastructure simply designed to further plunder Aceh.[6]

The enormous Lafarge Cement factory sits on the coast, some 20 kilometres from Banda Aceh. At the nearby fishing port, people complained about unusual fatigue, and the lack of medical facilities to help establish its cause. I met a group of women sitting on a bamboo bench by a food stall. 'It has been a month since my child began coughing and I don't know why,' said Ms Nurlaili. 'I took her to the local medical centre in Lampisang but she is not getting any better.'[7]

There are no environmental studies on the factory's operations available online or in Indonesian libraries. Another woman, Ms Ida, described the evenings when dust blowing from the factory became unbearable.

Periodically, there are demonstrations. People demonstrate against the roads that take their country's wealth away; they demonstrate against logging, mining and land grabs; and they even demonstrate against corruption.

Further down the USAID road, we entered a deep forest. For just a few dozen kilometres, we were again in unspoiled nature. Monkeys played freely at the sides of the road.

'It may not always be visible from the car, but illegal logging is everywhere,' said Salma Waty. 'It can be near the roads like in South Aceh, or it can be in the interior. In Aceh, we still have tigers and elephants. But because of illegal logging, the elephants become

desperate and frustrated and they try to get back at people. In some cases, they have destroyed entire villages.'

The tropical forest ended abruptly and the horizon filled with vast rice fields and the green beauty of the Bukit Barisan mountain range – but only briefly. A few more minutes drive, and devastated mountains came into full view as we entered a town called Lhoong. This is the site of PT Lhoong Setia Mining (LSM), a controversial and well 'protected' iron ore mining enterprise. According to Rachmat Junaedi of the PRA, the mining firm's owner is Jerry Petras, a former high-ranking officer in the Indonesian army.

According to Muhajir, a civil-society coordinator in Lhoong, after the peace agreement in 2005, the Department of Mining and Energy issued 105 mining licences in Aceh. 'Some are already in operation. A license for Lhoong and its PT LSM was issued in 2006. Analyses on the environmental impacts were done one year later – in 2007.'[8]

KALIMANTAN

When you travel from Bali to Kota Kinabalu on Malaysian Borneo, the plane flies over the heart of Indonesian Kalimantan. Except that it is too cynical to speak now of the heart of this once mysterious tropical island – it now looks more like gangrene. The view is shocking – mile after mile of scarred, logged-out land; black, burnt soil, smoke coming from the fires and factories. There seems to be no native forest left. Nowhere else in the world have I encountered such thorough natural devastation.

'When you fly over Kalimantan, you see that our forests have almost entirely disappeared. West Kalimantan has a long border with Malaysia, and Malaysian companies own most of the big plantations on our side. There are also Singaporean, US and British owners,' explained Anton P. Widjaya, executive director of WALHI (the Indonesian Forum for the Environment), in West Kalimantan. 'Now we have between 700,000 and 800,000 hectares of palm oil plantations in West Kalimantan. Licences have been already issued for 3.5 million hectares more.'[9]

But it gets much worse. On February 1, 2011, AFP reported:

> The forestry ministry made the startling admission that less than 20 per cent of plantation companies and less than 1.5 per cent of mining firms had official operating permits in Central Kalimantan, on the Indonesian side of Borneo. 'There are only 67

> plantation companies out of 352 that operate legally in Central Kalimantan province, while there are only nine out of 615 mine units that operate legally,' the ministry said in a statement.

As we drove up and down the road connecting Pontianak and the Malaysian border, we stopped at one of the houses surrounded by the palm oil plantation. Ibu Yati came to the bridge connecting her house and the road. Below, the water was polluted, thoroughly black. 'It was flooded like this for ages here,' she said. 'We used to plant rubber but the company from Pontianak came and made an offer we couldn't refuse, and since the beginning of this year we have been into palm oil.'

I asked her whether they did some water analyses. 'No', she replied, and then admitted that her entire family was bathing in the black liquid, washing their clothes and even dishes in it.[10]

Jefry from Riak Bumi, who was with us, shrugged. 'People here have no concept of cleanliness. They throw garbage everywhere, and defecate in the water in which they later wash themselves.'

'Why?' I asked.

'They know in the abstract about the necessity to be clean but they lack examples and there is no implementation of regulations.'

'Was it always like that?' He didn't know.

I also met Mr Simbolon, a truck driver, originally from Sumatra but now living and working in Kalimantan: 'Both islands only produce palm oil and rubber, almost nothing else,' he told us. 'There is no economic diversity, just a bit of subsistent farming.' It is worth recall that he was referring to two enormous landmasses – Kalimantan being the third, and Sumatra the sixth, largest islands in the world.

'We are aware of the situation', sighed Hermayani Putra. 'We are trying not to be pessimistic.' The WWF talks to the Asian Development Bank (ADB), to officials from the UN Development Programme (UNDP), and even to Dutch ministries, but he has come to the conclusion that all of them could be 'contributors to the problem more than to the solution'. 'We have to criticize the system,' Hermayani said. 'We can't run away from our problems. We are part of the global community.'

THE NORWEGIAN INITIATIVE

The Indonesian government appears to have no interest in saving its environment, even if it is paid to do so. It seems that it views

plunder of its own natural resources as preferable to (because in the short term it is more profitable than) sustainable development. The short term is all that matters in a country built on corruption and nepotism.

On May 26, 2010, Indonesia came to a preliminary deal with Norway, in which it was offered US$1 billion in exchange for halting forest clearing. This might appear a promising development, but the deal was criticized by many experts, who believed that the money would be used to fund further deforestation and to fuel corruption.

'The deal that was made has little to do with the present reality',[11] Maitar explained. 'Norway pledged US$1 billion, and Indonesia promised that it would hold up permits for new logging sites. But now the government is saying that the moratorium only concerns primary forest. Once again it is business as usual.'

That was in August 2011. Even the fiercest critics of the Indonesian regime could not have envisaged the embarrassing developments that followed. Online site Norwegian News in English summarized them on September 27, 2011:

> Norwegian Environment and Development Minister Erik Solheim may withdraw financial support to Indonesia if authorities decide to define palm oil plantations as forests.
>
> Head of Greenpeace Norway, Truls Gulowsen, says to NRK [the Norwegian broadcasting corporation] he thinks that calling the palm oil plantations as being part of the forests violates 'the intentions of this agreement that Indonesia has with Norway'. He also states that Indonesian authorities play with 'constructive definitions' in order to turn away from the agreement and use the funds to stop the deforestation. The Indonesian government's own climate committee shows preserving the rainforest is neither cost- nor climate-effective.
>
> The agreement, worth six billion kroner, regards protecting Indonesian forests to reduce CO_2 emissions. This could be in danger of being undermined because of strong Indonesian industrial interests, according to a Greenpeace report. The authorities want to use Norway's money to develop more palm oil plantations.

As an analogy, imagine that Tanzania or Kenya receives hundreds of millions of dollars to protect elephants, and uses it to purchase weapons to gun them down. Most likely as an act of vengeance, in

October 2011 the Indonesian government deported two Greenpeace campaigners: the UK executive director John Sauven, and Andy Tait, a forests campaigner focused on Greenpeace's work to reform Indonesian pulp and paper giant Asia Pulp and Paper.[12]

8

COLLAPSE OF INFRASTRUCTURE

It is close to midnight and the highway between Merak and Jakarta, which connects the islands of Java and Sumatra, is clogged with trucks. The traffic moves at a mere 3 km per hour. Two lanes out of four are closed for repair, but there is no visible activity at night, just as there were none during the day.

The trucks are regurgitating poisonous fumes, their monstrous chassis and cabins eaten by rust. The drivers are playing dangerous games, driving extremely close to passenger cars and buses. Time is cheap and so is human life.

In the middle of the road lies a dead body, covered by a filthy rug. Only one man guards it. There is no police and no ambulance in sight, no howling of sirens, no sign of any investigation. Nobody seems to care. It feels like Nord-Kivu in Congo/DRC, a war zone in sub-Saharan Africa. How this person died is a mystery – at the speed of the traffic, it could scarcely have been through impact with a moving vehicle. It could have been a suicide – an increasing phenomenon in this desperate nation – or something more sinister.

After two hours in the nocturnal Indonesian traffic jam, you lose all sense of time and purpose. Nothing seems to function here. The signal on my Blackberry periodically fades; mobile phone networks do not work reliably in Indonesia. To make a phone call with relatively clear reception is almost impossible these days, although the rates are not low. These problems are common to all the mobile networks, and Indonesia has fair amount of competition, which according to market dogma, should guarantee a smooth, efficient and competitively priced service.

Then a common form of craziness overwhelms several drivers. They don't shout and don't shoot – this is Java. They do something much more dangerous: they begin to drive, trying to push themselves into every tiny space that is left between the cars and lorries. They drive on the dusty shoulder, just a few inches from the vehicles on the left lane. Overcrowded buses and packed lorries are almost at the edge, and you often see vehicles toppled in the ditch. The scene is illuminated only by headlights and those few stars that manage to penetrate the black clouds of pollution.

This common Indonesian scene is not unlike what can be seen in Bangladesh and a few countries in sub-Saharan Africa, but it is completely unlike other Southeast Asian nations such as Thailand and Malaysia. The Indonesian infrastructure has collapsed – it is gone, destroyed. It is decades behind that of its neighbours, and now probably at least 30 years behind China, and the gap is growing, as there is no coherent and realistic plan to improve the infrastructure. The truth is that much of the Indonesian infrastructure is beyond repair, and unless a national emergency is declared and tens, if not hundreds, of billions of dollars are allocated annually for a fundamental overhaul, the country will come to a standstill within a few years.

Foreign media and academia periodically comment on the traffic jams in Indonesian cities and on the infrastructure problems, but in-depth analyses are extremely rare. As always, Indonesia's problems tend to be analysed separately: the 1965 massacres, the moral corruption, the Berkeley Mafia and its market fundamentalism are never put together.

FERRIES SINK

Indonesian ferries are sinking with frightening regularity. They sink not because of high winds and waves, but because they are overcrowded and badly maintained; or more precisely because they are allowed to become overcrowded and badly maintained. That is the market system with an Indonesian – post-1965 – accent: get as many people on board as you can, pay close to nothing to the staff and don't maintain the equipment as long as you don't have to.

Everything is for sale in Indonesia, even the safety of thousands of passengers. Companies care only about their profits, while government inspectors are busy collecting bribes. In the well-publicized sinking of the *Senopati Nusantara* ferry on December 30, 2006, hundreds were killed, but it was just one of the host of maritime disasters that occur in Indonesia each year. While there are no exact statistics available, it is known that some maritime routes lose three or more vessels a year.

On the bridge of a sizeable ferry sailing from Bali to Lombok, Captain Agus confided his frustration:

> There are so many things that should be improved. Our ports are not fit to carry all the traffic that they are expected to handle. They are already used to the fullest. Ferries have to wait in the

> open sea before docking. Our company has 17 ferries, but only a few of them are modern. In Indonesia, due to poor maintenance, ferries that are only 20 to 30 years old are not fit to sail any more. Company owners think about their profits, not about safety. The state should offer better supervision over the private sector, but it doesn't.[1]

As if to prove his words, on my way back, the ferry (which is run by PT Putra Master) made a stop in the middle of the high sea a full mile from the port of Padangbai, and circled for more than an hour, waiting for another ferry to depart and free a harbour berth. The drivers of the cars and trucks on board turned on their engines so they could run their air-conditioners. From a distance, ferries can appear to be on fire, smothered with black fumes coming from the ship's stacks and from the vehicle compartment.

AIRPLANES CRASH

The Indonesian airline industry has one of the worst safety records in the world. Between 2001 and 2011, hundreds of people died in major airplane crashes all over the Indonesian archipelago. Some of the pilots are so badly trained that planes skid off the runway, miss the runway altogether or land in the middle of it. Maintenance is another issue: flaps often don't function properly, wheels cannot be retracted after take-off, and seldom-changed tyres have a tendency to blow up on touchdown. It is mystifying how some airplanes – particularly the old Boeing 737s that are operated by almost all Indonesian airlines – make it through inspections.

An Adam Air Boeing 737 with 102 people on board, departing from Surabaya for Manado on January 1, 2007, disappeared from the radar and was never seen again. Merpati flight 8968 crashed on May 7, 2011, an accident put down to 'heavy rain'.

After long discussion with local civil aviation officials (who understandably did not want to be identified), I learned that the navigation systems at several major Indonesian airports are in a disastrous state, particularly those at Makassar in Sulawesi and Medan in Sumatra.

At the small Curug airport outside Jakarta, I saw several Cessnas on training flights, with the pilots circling the area, perfecting take-offs and landings. This airport recently lost a plane – a Sundowner – killing the pilot and injuring two trainees. The atmosphere was relaxed: some men were practising on one of the flight

simulators, others sleeping on the veranda overlooking the runway. This is the only place in Indonesia where commercial pilots are trained, and it was obvious that its capacity is extremely limited and discipline is lax.

'Lion Air and other airlines including Garuda Indonesia are expanding their fleets. They need approximately 400 new pilots and technicians every year,' explained Beny Suherman, deputy administration manager in charge of the instructors at the Indonesia Civil Aviation Institute in Curug. 'But the school can only provide between 150 and 200 pilots. There are some private schools for pilots, but we are the only certified state-run training institute.'[2]

The European Union barred all 51 Indonesian airlines from landing on its runways in 2007, citing lax safety standards. In 2009 it lifted the ban on Garuda and three other carriers, including Mandala, which has since collapsed.

TERRIBLE ROADS

Java, with over 150 million inhabitants (by the official count), basically relies on two-lane, dilapidated, potholed roads. Extremely slow exhaust-belching trucks fight over the narrow ribbons of asphalt with notoriously aggressive buses, private cars, motorbikes, pedestrians and two-wheeled carts pulled by men on foot. Breakdowns of vehicles are frequent, causing entire stretches of roads to shut down periodically. According to the Jakarta Statistics Agency, over 1,000 motorists lose their lives every year in the capital city alone. The statistics for the rest of the country are unreliable but equally gruesome.

The quality of the few existing motorways (the longest is only around 150 km long, connecting Jakarta with Bandung) is extremely bad; their surfaces are patched and uneven. The toll roads were privatized some time ago through a dubious and corrupt process, and this has led to high fees and extremely poor services. Frequent manually operated toll booths slow down traffic. The notorious lack of traffic law enforcement (speed limits are not monitored, trucks and buses are not forced to stay in slow lanes, and there are hardly any random exhaust checks) makes driving extremely hazardous.

Despite the fact that Indonesia has a relatively small number of cars per capita, its road networks are among the most heavily used in the world (second only to Hong Kong): an average 5.7 million vehicles used each kilometre in the year 2003.[3] Despite the generally

slow pace of traffic, 80-plus people die on an average every day on Indonesian roads according to the *Financial Times*.[4]

The car lobbies are so powerful and business interests rate so much higher than the general national interest that most projects to improve the transportation system in Indonesia are killed without any discussion. Perverting and blurring the facts, ignoring the logic, lying to the public – all these are parts of the plan to assemble more foreign cars no matter what cost it brings to Indonesia.

Dahlan Iskan, now minister of state-owned enterprises, visited China in March 2004 in his former position as CEO of the Jawa Pos Group (a right-wing media conglomerate). Ignoring the fact that China was beginning to build the greatest high-speed railway network in the world, as well as improving its ports, airports and public transportation, he published a note which was quoted all over Indonesia, arguing that the existence of railways contributes to a fall in land price in the area, while with the toll roads the price of the surrounding land increases:

> With transforming railways to toll roads, millions of farmers who own land will be much richer!
>
> PRC follows successful strategy of the US. I am a bit surprised when reading news about the cooperation in ASEAN, a plan to build railroads. Those plans have to be changed – we have to build highways. With railroads, it won't bring value added .... If we have toll roads in Kalimantan, then the price of land there would be higher. The same goes for Sumatra.[5]

This appallingly low level of analysis is all that is available.

ROTTING TRAINS

On an average, there is one deadly train accident every six days in Indonesia. Many are caused by the lack of gates at the country's 8,000 level crossings. One of the deadliest crashes in recent history occurred in October 2010 near the city of Pemalang in Central Java, and killed at least 36 people. In comparison, Malaysia had no fatal accident for the 13 years up to 2005 (the last year for which statistics are available).[6]

The railway network is still state-owned with reasonably priced services, but since that goes against all the principles of Indonesian capitalism, privatization is looming on the horizon. There is almost no investment in tracks and rolling stock. Trains withdrawn from

service in Japan serve some routes around greater Jakarta, but they are badly maintained and tend to deteriorate within a few years after delivery. Some trains serving the suburbs of the main cities are so overcrowded that passengers are forced to sit on the roof of the moving carriages or hang from open doors (which is possible because the automatic doors often do not work).

Periodically, the Indonesian press offers juicy descriptions of commuting:

> As speakers at Kota railway station in Central Jakarta announced the departure of the Kota-Rangkasbitung train, hundreds of passengers jostled to board the already packed carriages, to have one foot caught in the automated doors …. Those who could not get inside scrambled onto the roof, keeping their head low and away from the high-voltage electric cable hovering less than 1 meter above them. An average of 20 passengers are electrocuted each year by the cables.[7]

Most stations have not been expanded or updated since the time of Dutch colonial rule. Because of the lack of public transportation and sidewalks, it is very difficult for the public to access many surviving stations.

Hari Sungkari, an architect, general secretary of the Indonesian Society for Digital Creative Industries and a frequent user of the railway network, sees a bleak future for the Indonesian railways:

> During the Dutch colonial rule, they built around 12,000 kilometers of track across the archipelago. In 1980, only 6,000 kilometers were functional. By 2000, that number had shrunk to only 4,000 kilometers. The problem in Indonesia is that the private sector and the state insist on making transportation profitable. But in most countries, transportation is a service, not a money-making venture.[8]

On August 14, 2011, the *Jakarta Post* reported:

> Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle member Nusyirwan Soedjono, a deputy chairman of House of Representatives' Commission V overseeing transportation affairs, has long questioned the government's reluctance to allocate more state funding for the improvement of the country's railway network, blaming its submission to 'high-level' political lobbying arranged by the

Photo 8.1 This giant garbage dump in Cimahi, near the city of Bandung in West Java, exploded in 2005, killing at least 140 people

automotive industry, which has received direct advantages from the rapid development of the country's road infrastructure.

There has been no story of us [the Commission V] rejecting the government's budget proposal for developing railway infrastructure,' Nusyirwan told *The Jakarta Post*. 'But it seems like there have been certain 'powerful groups' which always oppose every attempt to advance the services of our mass transportation, especially trains.[9]

CITY TRANSPORT PROBLEMS

Indonesian cities are choking, with no public transportation to speak of. Tens of thousands of human lives are lost annually, and billions of dollars are lost too because of the appalling infrastructure. People die from respiratory diseases and cancer caused by pollution; millions arrive late at workplaces, meetings and airports. Ambulances (there are actually not many of those in Indonesia) get stuck for hours in jams.

Jakarta, the only city of its size in the world without a mass transit system, will face total gridlock by 2012, if the situation does not improve dramatically and soon. But despite the horrible pollution, unbridled traffic and collapsed quality of life, there is no coherent plan at any level of the government. The elites are nourishing their bank accounts from this mess – seemingly irrational choices have sound commercial values. Of course, the rich don't live there, or at least not permanently – they have second and third houses in Singapore, Hong Kong, the United States and Australia.

While Beijing and other major Chinese cities have banned scooters and motorbikes (and built hundreds of miles of modern efficient metro systems), people in Jakarta and all other Indonesian cities now fully rely on scooters and the like. Cities with 1 to 2 million inhabitants like Bandung, Palembang, Denpasar and Medan have no public transportation at all, just a few corroded privately owned minivans.

Asked to compare Indonesia and China, Professor Dadang M. Maksoem, a former lecturer at UPM (University Putra Malaysia), who now works for the government of West Java, became furious:

> Very simple: they [the Chinese] are committed to do their best for their nation. There is no dedication like that here. How come, in this part of the world, governments can't even provide decent public transportation? People are forced to buy their own motorcycles to transport themselves – forced to risk their lives, having terrible accidents. Now there are traffic gridlocks everywhere. You can say that our system is stupid, idiotic, brain-dead, or greedy. Just go on and fill the gap![10]

INADEQUATE SERVICES

Even according to official sources, less than half of Indonesians have access to clean water and sanitation, and only 65 per cent have electricity.

The internet in Indonesia is notoriously unreliable, particularly in villages and small towns (where there is sometimes no service at all), and also in the poorer neighbourhoods of major cities. It is much slower than in many African countries, including Kenya, and much costlier than in most other Southeast Asian countries. Only 12 per cent of Indonesians used the internet in 2010, while only 5 per cent had access to a personal computer.[11]

Rafdian Rasyid, vice president of PT. Infokom Elektrindo, explained:

> When it comes to internet development, we are very much behind. Ideally, we should have broadband connection to the homes using cables. One of the problems is that our government does not prioritize communications. Both the Malaysian and Singaporean governments have national programmes for broadband connection. Recently, we started with the Palapa Ring programme where we just identified that broadband internet access is a 'very important part of [the] modern telecommunication infrastructure'.[12]

Landlines are difficult to obtain, and the waiting time can be several years. Only around 11 per cent of Indonesians have access to landlines,[13] so people are forced to use mobile services – an expensive and unreliable option, as all mobile services have limited network capacity, which translates into extremely bad reception.

'Almost all operators have great marketing strategies and advertisements', Eris Trisnowati, former senior sales engineering manager of PT Motorola Indonesia, told me. 'But the reality is far from what they promote. We have a chaotic network here in Indonesia.'[14]

Medical facilities are divided into several classes like old trains. According to the latest available statistics (2003), Indonesia was ranked 169 out of 201 countries and territories for the number of physicians per 1,000 people.[15] Even what is supposed to be for free is charged; corruption in medical facilities is rampant. As a result, those who can tend to seek medical care – which is usually better and often cheaper – abroad.

During a visit to New Zealand for a presentation at the Pacific Media Center, I was told by Sony Ambudi, an Indonesian doctor who now lives in Auckland:

> Indonesia actually developed several excellent concepts in the field of public health. Take *Puskesmas* [primary health clinics] for instance, which began operating in 1974. These were like mini hospitals, even in the middle of the jungle or some isolated island. Everything is there and people have to pay nothing or very little. But the corrupt governments, central and local, killed the project. How? Typical corruption practice: officials began using *Puskesmas* and other community health programmes as

> their 'personal revenue centres', producing fake reports. I see no solution. Revolution is the only way forward![16]

Back in Jakarta, veteran dentist Dr Indrayani from the Dr Suyoto Hospital explained that *Puskesmas* could deal with light medical cases only:

> If for example, a patient has a blood anomaly, we don't have the equipment at *Puskesmas* to treat it. No equipment, no lab, and the patient eventually passes away without finding out what exactly is wrong with him/her.
>
> When it comes to dental treatment, *Puskesmas* can do very little: usually extraction. There is no equipment there. Forget about root canals. *Puskesmas* are for the poor and lower middle class, and patients have to pay between Rp5,000 (60 cents) and Rp11,000 (US$1.10), something they can often hardly afford.[17]

Harapan Kita Hospital is one of the best clinics in Indonesia. This is where Ms S, one of the greatest performing artists of this country, took a blood sample from her father, who was in failing health. Ms S does not want to be identified from the fear that the hospital will sue her for defamation, a common practice. After several failed attempts to get her father diagnosed in their home city of Bandung, she gave up and brought the blood sample to Harapan Kita in Jakarta. Several weeks passed with no news. Her father kept losing weight and Ms S began calling Jakarta several times a day, but there was no one able to provide her with the results. One day she learned the truth: the sample had been lost. Could she please send a new one? Not long afterwards, her father passed away without ever learning from what illness he was suffering. Dragged from one incompetent doctor to another, the family lost its loved one, and on top of it, was financially ruined.

The Indonesian medical infrastructure is in a shambles. Patients with hard to get state insurance are informed by doctors that the medicine covered by their plan is not available, only for the doctors to be followed by nurses who offer the very same drug for 'half of the market price'. The few ambulances charge exorbitant prices and are nothing more than old minivans with stretchers.

The incompetence of Indonesian medical staff is legendary. In Bali, I knew of a foreign tourist who fell from a motorbike and broke his leg. 'We will have to amputate', said the doctor in a hospital in Denpasar. The terrified patient limped to a public phone

and called a friend, who smuggled him in the middle of the night from the hospital, drove him to the airport and shoved him into a Singapore Airlines plane. In Singapore, his injury was treated as minor and he was released from the hospital in two days, wearing a cast.

On January 3, 2012, Reuters offered a bleak but honest account of the Indonesian electricity supply, claiming that 'Indonesia's inability to meet the rising energy needs of its businesses, from steel makers to hotel resorts, threatens to put the breaks on growth in Southeast Asia largest economy.'[18] The article stated:

> Indonesia is the world's largest exporter of coal and the third-largest exporter of liquefied natural gas (LNG), but almost one-third of its citizens have no access to electricity. In outlying regions such as Papua, the figure rises to more than half.
>
> A World Bank report for 2011 ranks Indonesia 161st among 183 countries in the ease of business getting reliable electricity supply, down three places from the previous year. In this category, Indonesia has received worse grades than Congo and Albania.

The tragedy is that after 1965, all public services were dismantled. Services that are considered public necessities in many Asian countries, in Latin America and in Europe, are required to make a profit in Indonesia. Unlike in China, when a metro line is planned in Jakarta it is described as a private investment, and the main criterion is whether it will make a profit for its investors. 'Public' buses are actually business ventures, and so are hospitals, ambulances and highways. As there could be no profit made from waste management or sewers, from public parks, sidewalks and other public spaces, there are virtually none of these left.

9

ISLAM

It seems as if some time ago – most likely right after the massacres of 1965, when the religious cadres of Indonesia joined in killing leftists all over the archipelago – the Western political elites as well as its mainstream media and academia decided that Indonesia was a 'moderate and tolerant state'. Since then, no amount of intolerance, brutality, prejudice, religious discrimination or outright violence in this nation with the world's largest Muslim population has changed that predominant impression. This position has clear advantages for Western capitalist forces opposed to social justice and progressive change, since the leading religion in Indonesia has served as an oppressive force against any striving for these social goods.

'Why has the West, especially the US, has not been critical of us? It is because of our strategic geopolitical position,' explained Noor Huda Ismail, a leading expert on Islamic extremism in Indonesia. Huda himself was raised in a radical *madrasa* (religious school), before changing course and opting to help several potential and actual hardline Islamic terrorists and their families to reintegrate into society and abandon militancy. At one point he worked as a correspondent for the *Washington Post*.

> They use Indonesia as some sort of a buffer zone to keep in check the 'rise of China and India'. They also consider that we can 'talk' and 'negotiate with the West' – that we are West's ally. Indonesia is the country with the largest Muslim population in the world. To portray Indonesia as a moderate Muslim country becomes useful – it calms existing beliefs and fears among the people in the West, especially in the US, that the clash of civilizations is inevitable.
>
> As a matter of fact, this game is destructive – it's endangering the future of Indonesian people because most of our leaders are now intertwined with Western interests. They see the Western system as their role model that could help them to restore the country. We are Asians and we have very different ways of thinking and solving problems. If our leaders continue playing

> this game – defending the interests of the West in this part of the world – they will be selling their and our souls to the devil.[1]

Around 88 per cent of Indonesia's inhabitants are believed to be Muslim, most of them Sunni. Religion has often played a destabilizing, even destructive, role in this young nation. During the Sukarno period, Indonesia had to fight to uphold its secular essence against Muslim groups seeking to establish a caliphate, a religious state.

'I apologise to the communists', declared Abdurrahman Wahid, former president of Indonesia and the former leader of the largest Muslim organization in the world, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). He uttered these words first to me in private and then on camera for my film *Terlena*. 'I offer this apology because I don't want Islam to go down the history as a bigoted religion. And I am a Muslim.'

My understanding is that he regretted NU's decision to oppose the communists and side with Western political, ideological and economic interests in 1965. NU, and especially its youth organization Pemuda Ansor, threw its weight and person power behind the military, and as a result it became involved in the slaughter of millions.

Mrs Sulami, former secretary general of Gerwani, explained in the documentary film *The Women and the Generals* how the land reform advocated by the PKI on behalf of the poor led to mobilization and mass killing by the Islamic cadres:

> The struggles were between those who possessed the land and the workers and the landless farmers, between the proprietors and the trade unions of the landless workers. Islamic clerics often doubled as big landowners. They labelled those who advocated reforms as communists.

Investigative reporter Wayne Madsen expanded on this, drawing on several important formerly secret documents:

> A CIA Intelligence Memorandum, formerly Secret and dated 23 July 1966, clearly sees the Muslim Nahdatul Ulama party (NU) … as a natural ally of the United States and the Suharto regime. The report states that it helped Suharto put down the Communists in the post-coup time frame, especially where the NU was strongest: East Java … and North Sumatra and parts of Borneo. An 29 April 1966, formerly Secret CIA Intelligence Memorandum on

> the PKI states: 'Moslem extremists in many instances outdid the army in hunting down and murdering members of the party [PKI] and its front groups.'[2]

In short, because Indonesian Islam became an ally of Western interests and opposed communism (and all progressive parties, movements and individuals), it became beyond criticism, and was promoted (entirely contrary to the reality) as 'peaceful' and 'tolerant'.

Naomi Klein wrote in *The Shock Doctrine:*

> The more indiscriminate massacres for which Suharto is infamous were, for the most part, delegated to religious students. They were quickly trained by the military and then sent into villages on instructions from the chief of the navy to 'sweep' the countryside of Communists. 'With relish,' wrote one reporter, 'they called out their followers, stuck their knives and pistols in their waistbands, swung their clubs over their shoulders, and embarked on the assignment for which they have long been hoping.'[3]

According to Pramoedya Ananta Toer, the brutality of the Muslim cadres did not end with the massacres. This is what he told us about the humiliation the prisoners suffered in Buru concentration camp:

> Muslims sent to Buru by the government kept lecturing us about our wrongdoings. I remember clearly one sentence they kept repeating: 'Serves you right! Now you are like dogs with your tail between your legs.' The Islamic people always swore at us and ridiculed us whenever they arrived in Buru. All of them! However, while Muslims kept insulting us, Christians offered some support. They gave us clothes and spectacles. That's why many prisoners decided to convert to Catholicism and Protestantism.[4]

The next stage of cooperation between the West and Indonesian Islam came with the Soviet Union's war in Afghanistan, where numerous jihadi cadres from Indonesia joined hardened international CIA-backed *mujahideen* units.

One of the very few outspoken critics of Islam in Indonesia was Pramoedya Ananta Toer, a self-proclaimed Marxist and atheist. But even 'Pram' was scared of Islam. He told me in his house in Depok, just a few months before his final departure, 'I am not afraid to criticize imperialism or capitalism, but I am afraid to touch the religion. They are capable of anything.' After he passed away, his

family arranged a Muslim funeral for him, something that would have upset him greatly, while his former comrades had to sing the *Internationale* and other communist songs outside on the street.

Pram's thoughts on religion and on the religion-based family structure were very straightforward:

> In my opinion, religion only teaches people how to beg, but maybe other people will feel insulted by my views. However, if they are saying that God is fair, can they show us where that fairness can be found in this world? They also say that God is omnipotent, but again I disagree, because I believe that everything on this earth depends on human effort. Better to depend on one's own strength than to expect something from above. People shouldn't act and think irrationally. They shouldn't have irrational expectations.
>
> If parents are not good, why should the children respect them just because they are older? Children exist because their parents enjoyed the act of breeding. Here, words are always twisted: breeding is called love and begging is called praying.[5]

In many parts of the country *madrasas* provide the only relatively affordable education, but it comes at the price of religious indoctrination. Countless *madrasas* in Indonesia are funded from abroad, mostly from the Gulf.

For many Indonesians, mosques are the only available places of social and public gathering. Paradoxically, Muslim organizations and parties are acquiring for mosques and religious schools land that could be used as public space. The government does not intervene, and the result is that in some places, including East Jakarta, there are dozens of mosques per square kilometre, but no playgrounds for children, no parks or sport facilities. Unlike in other countries, Indonesian mosques do not provide playgrounds for children, public benches or parks. The mosques only serve religious, indoctrination and investment purposes.

Similar trends can be observed in several other nations where Islam is the majority religion, and secular and progressive governments have been destroyed (often with direct intervention from outside) and replaced by pro-business feudal ruling elites.

The Indonesian public is increasingly turning to religion in the wake of the collapse of the social security net. But it would be incorrect to conclude that Islam and other religions in Indonesia are providing a useful service by filling some of the gaps in state provision. On the contrary, I believe most of the Islamic

organizations have acted against the public interest in blocking any attempts to gain social justice.

It is true that Muslim religious leaders who were staunch allies of the West in its 'war against communism' have been enraged by more recent US foreign policy. Some are vocal in their outrage at the US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the pressure on Iran and what is seen as blind and unconditional support for Israel. However they continue to resist pressure for land reform or social justice. Fear of anything 'socialist', even 'social', is deeply embedded in the psyche of many religious leaders. (Abdurrahman Wahid was a notable but rare exception.)

For example, in June 2010, religious militants in the city of Banyuwangi in East Java disrupted a meeting at a restaurant in Pakis village, between Indonesian legislators and a group of local residents. Some high-ranking politicians, including Ribka Tjiptaning Proletariati, chairwoman of the House of Representatives 'Commission IX' overseeing health issues, and commission member Rieke Dyah Ayu Pitaloka, had come to discuss health care problems and legislation reform with constituents. Pitaloka told the *Jakarta Globe* that 10 to 15 people from the Islamic Ummah Forum, most likely encouraged by the local branch of the radical but legal Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), demanded that the gathering be broken up. They claimed it was a reunion of former PKI members.

The *Jakarta Globe* reported:

> When they first came in they didn't do anything, but once reporters came they got excited, shouting Allahu Akbar [God is Great!] and disrupting the meeting,' Rieke said.
>
> 'We were discussing a social welfare bill that says anyone can be treated in hospital. We were engaged in activities that are protected by the Constitution,' Rieke said. 'This is just thuggery in the guise of religion.'[6]

It is illegal to criticize religion in Indonesia, so whenever religious cadres commit a crime, it is almost always labelled as 'thuggery', or something that is 'hiding behind religion'.

While the Muslim majority is extremely protective of its symbolism, particularly anything connected to the Prophet, it is often hostile and insensitive towards other believers. Atheism is banned, while hundreds of churches have been attacked or forcibly shut down on the grounds that their existence offends the 'sensitivity' of the

majority. Many Catholics and Protestants have no choice but to pray in rented halls in shopping malls or hotels.

Periodically, there is some resistance. In early March 2009, Buddhist youths demonstrated and blocked the entrance to a newly opened 'Buddha Bar', associated with the Buddha Bars in Paris and New York, which they felt violated their religious sensitivities. The bar was in the old Dutch-built cultural centre, which in colonial days had exhibited works by Chagall and Picasso and is now naturally privatized. The students were demanding that the name be changed, but they succeeded in closing the bar completely.

GETTING AWAY WITH VIOLENCE

On July 25, 2008, armed gangs from East Jakarta attacked students from the Arastamar Evangelical School of Theology (SETIA) and their campus in Kampung Pulo. The police refused to intervene and at least 20 students were injured, some with machete cuts. In the following days, the staff members and students were evacuated, even as protestors armed with swords, machetes, bamboo stakes and acid continued to chase young people through the narrow alleys. Almost immediately, the Indonesian media played down the incident.

Photo 9.1 Children at Madrassah Azziyadah in Klender, East Jakarta

In August 2008, 650 female students from the school were housed on a vast campground and jamboree site in Cibubur, a suburb just half an hour's drive from the centre of Jakarta. Green military tents dotted the site. Hundreds of girls, some as young as 15, called this camp home for over a year. This is where they ate and washed, slept and studied, separated from the rain and mud by the thin fabric of the tents. From the outset conditions were bad. Dozens of girls had to share huge tents, while the water supply and access to toilets were limited.

Six hundred boys were housed in a so-called transit hotel in the city.

The students were offered no professional psychological help, despite the fact that many were still suffering from trauma. There was hardly any international coverage. The US ambassador visited the camp once, discreetly and quietly, without making any official statement.

Entris, one of the victims of the attack, recalled to me the events of July 28:

> They broke into our place in the middle of the night. For three days we tried to hide in the dormitory. We were surrounded and couldn't do anything. The attackers used stones and firebombs and they even had guns. The media tried to play it down, claiming that this was not a religious attack, but we all heard it, what the attackers were screaming: 'Go get their people. Go and fight for your religion.' And the crowd was responding: 'Jihad! Let's go – let's do jihad against SETIA students! Let's fry them – let's make satay from them!' I spoke to the press. We said exactly what happened. We explained everything to TV-One, to RCTI and to other channels and publications. They only wrote and showed what suited them, and never anything about the religious nature of the attacks.[7]

Another girl, Erna, confirmed her friend's testimony: 'They attacked the male dormitory first and later the female dormitory. They shouted from the mosque, "Jihad, Allahu Akbar, attack, kill them, burn them!"' According to several eyewitnesses, the police stood by and just watched this attack against 1,200 children and young people, some of who were left on the ground bleeding.

In June 2008, shortly before the assault on the SETIA students, members of the FPI attacked secularists at the National Monument (Monas) in Central Jakarta, leaving at least 70 people injured. Activists from the National Alliance for the Freedom of Faith and

Religion (AKKBB) had entered the Monas area to commemorate the 63rd year of Pancasila state ideology when they were confronted and beaten by the FPI members, a spokesperson for the Jakarta Police told the *Jakarta Post*.

According to the eyewitnesses, some 1,200 police officers were at the scene when the clash occurred, but they refused to intervene. To the outrage of human rights groups and the minorities, the police later argued that arresting the attackers would have been counter-productive, as it would have fuelled even wider riots.

For years, the FPI has been trashing bars, pork-selling outlets and 'deviant and blasphemous' groups and sects under the noses of law enforcement officers, who in most cases did nothing to protect the victims. Even after the Monas attack and despite the pressure from human rights organizations, the Attorney General Hendarman Supandji indicated that the FPI would not be outlawed immediately: 'First, we issue them reprimands, then we go to the Supreme Court', he said. SBY also condemned the attack but refused to take any decisive action against FPI.

At a press conference one day after the attack, FPI leader Habib Rizieq Shihab showed no fear or remorse. His defiance was obvious. Instead of apologising to AKKBB, he turned his wrath against the members of the Ahmadiyah sect, declaring, 'We will never allow the arrest of a single member of our force before the government dissolves Ahmadiyah. We will fight to our last drop of blood.' Critics say that the Indonesian state has demonstrated that it is determined to protect criminals and punish their victims, especially if the criminals belong to the religious majority.

'There is nothing we can do to stop this', declared Ditasari, a progressive political leader and former head of PRD, formerly the only left-wing opposition party in Indonesia:[8]

> Indonesia has been hijacked by the Islamists and religion has full control over the society. We can't reverse the process any more. We can only slow it down to some degree. You can't say that you don't believe in God any more. Most of the citizens of Indonesia have never even heard that there are people who don't believe in God. For years, atheists were compared to Marxists, and Marxists were the official and legitimate target.
>
> This presidency is the worst that could have happened to Indonesia. He is not willing to take decisive action to defend the constitution. And decisive actions are needed urgently, as Indonesia is right now at the crossroads.

According to Eva Kusuma Sundari, there is a new fear all around Indonesia: the fear of FPI, and of fundamentalism:

> We the politicians: yes, we are scared people. Whenever I asked at the House for support for the minority or secular groups, my colleagues are afraid that they will lose support of their voters. There is a fear that they would be labelled as anti-Islamic. So I am often the only one defending those who are abused in the House. What is even more pathetic is that many of my non-Muslim colleagues feel 'uneasy' to defend, for instance, Christian groups that are under attack from the FPI. They say it creates a 'conflict of interests'. They all rely on me because I am actually a Muslim. Sometimes, I don't know what to think. Muslims say that they are afraid of being called anti-Islamic, and the Christians say that they are afraid of putting their group's interests first. All courage in this country is gone.[9]

There is a brutal and irrefutable logic to all that MP Eva Kusuma Sundari described. Critics of Indonesian Islam have nowhere to turn. At home, the regime is firmly on the side of the Islamists, who go unpunished even after openly committing crimes, after beating and murdering people in front of the police. In the West, support for the Indonesian religion is constant and unbending, as it is seen as helping to uphold the economic and political 'order' and to oppress socially oriented movements. No matter how brutal the attacks against secularists and members of other religions, the West stubbornly ignores the facts and describes the Indonesian brand of religion as 'moderate and tolerant'.

In our long discussion on the topic, Nursyahbani Katjasungkana, a former member of the House of Representatives (from the National Awakening Party, a progressive Islamic political party), a human rights lawyer and outspoken critic of the present administration, went even further:

> When Ms Clinton came here and spoke about tolerant Islam and human rights, she obviously decided not to mention many incidents that prove the opposite. Since 1965, Indonesia has been a staunch US ally. And those who forged such an alliance here and there control the mass media; so the criticism of the human rights in Indonesia very rarely makes headlines in Indonesia or in the West. Also, because Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world, the West thinks that Indonesia could control,

or at least influence, the Muslim population all over the world – naturally under the Western leadership![10]

The United States is very well aware of this paradoxical situation. Here is a part of a cable classified as 'Secret' that was released by Wikileaks on August 30, 2011.[11] Dated May 9, 2010, it was sent from the US Embassy in Jakarta to the State Department in Washington DC:

SECURITY FORCES' RELATIONS WITH FPI

¶14. (S/NF) BIN official Yahya Asagaf, who had sufficiently close contacts within FPI to provide us with advance notice of FPI's hostile intent hours prior to the February 19 vandalism of the Embassy, told us that, prior to that incident, National Police Chief Sutanto had provided some funds to FPI. Yahya claimed that, after the attack, Sutanto had cut off this funding. When we questioned Yahya's allegation that Sutanto funded FPI, Yahya said Sutanto found it useful to have FPI available to him as an 'attack dog.' When pressed further on the usefulness of FPI playing this role, noting that the Police should be sufficiently capable of intimidation, Yahya characterized FPI as a useful tool that could spare the security forces from criticism for human rights violations, and he said funding FPI was a 'tradition' of the Police and BIN. (The principal BIN figure who provided funds to FPI was BIN Deputy Chief Said Ali As'at, Yahya claimed.) Yahya said the FPI had obtained a majority of its funds from the security forces, and, after mid-February, FPI faced a budget crunch.

¶15. (C/NF) Yahya added that former Jakarta Police Chief Nugroho Djayusman had called on BIN Chief Syamsir Siregar on February 18 in order to claim he was 'not involved with FPI.' This claim implied Nugroho had advance knowledge of FPI's plan for the February 19 incident.

¶16. (C/NF) In March, we met with Nugroho Djayusman, who admitted, 'I used to be close to the radical Islamists.' He then explained defensively that it was natural for him, as the Jakarta Police Chief, to have contacts with all sorts of organizations. This was necessary because the sudden release of energy from the Islamists, who had been repressed under Suharto, could have posed a security risk. 'But it doesn't mean I was involved,' he said, distancing himself from responsibility for any violent activities.

The National Police spokesman Sr. Comr. Boy Rafli Amar snapped

back in the pages of the *Jakarta Post* on September 5, 2011.[12] He declared that 'The police treats the FPI as they would any other civilian group' and that 'As a part of society, the FPI is our partner … in a positive way.'

GETTING AWAY WITH MURDER: THE HORROR OF CIKEUSIK

In his outburst after the Monas attack, Habib referred to Ahmadiyah, an old and well-established Muslim sect with more than 500,000 members that has been under repeated attack – its members threatened, harassed and beaten – over the last few years. Several Islamic groups, including the Council of Ulemas (MUI), declared the sect blasphemous because its members believe that Mohammad was not the last prophet. (According to them the last prophet was Ahmad.) The government, and particularly SBY, refused to protect the sect from the attacks led by the radicals, eventually yielding to the Ulemas and banning Ahmadiyahs from preaching in public.

'Ahmadiyah arrived in Indonesia in 1925', explained Zafrullah Pontoh, one of the sect's leaders in a face-to-face interview:

> We were registered in 1953 and between 1925 and 1980 there were no physical attacks against our members. Of course, there were many debates between our and mainstream scholars. But then MUI announced their decision that Ahmadiyah is actually not a Muslim sect and the attacks began. We were labelled as deviants. The attacks intensified particularly after 2005. Recently, our mosque in Sukabumi was burned down. Several of our mosques and schools were demolished and the local government had sealed six of our other mosques. Three cabinet ministers jointly declared that we couldn't preach openly.
>
> Intolerance is growing. Both Liberal Islam and Shia Muslims here are being targeted. Shias simply don't even dare to say openly that they are Shia; otherwise, they would encounter the same fate as our people.[13]

In 2011, events began to evolve with increasing speed. On two days of the same week, two gruesome attacks shook Indonesia and the world. On February 6, 2011, in Cikeusik village, West Java, more than a thousand furious Muslims brutally lynched a group of Ahmadiyah members. The attack was filmed on several of the attackers' mobile phones (a very common practice in Indonesia),

then distributed on the Web. Three people died and seven were wounded.

This is how the *Asia Times* described the video:

> Video footage has emerged showing the murders in graphic detail. First a mob armed with knives, sticks and stones attacked a group of Ahmadis defending a home. Rocks fly, glass shatters, a man smiles for the camera and the overwhelmed police mill about helplessly.
>
> Later, two men are shown, stripped from the waist down, lying lifeless and muddied on the ground. Blood oozes into the mud, shouts of 'Allahu Akbar' ('God is great', in Arabic) erupt and the attackers launch another savage volley of blows using sticks and bamboo poles, as others use their phones to record it.[14]

I tried to access the video but had first to provide evidence that I was more than 18 years old, and when I returned on February 14 the video appeared to have been deleted.

This was not my first experience of lynching and torture in Indonesia. In many other cases I actually witnessed gruesome events. It is difficult to think of any other parts of contemporary Asia that rival Indonesia in 'mob justice' and brutality. I still remember with shivering the self-congratulatory smiles of murderers in Ambon (Moluccas), in Solo, Lombok and East Timor. Many of those seen committing gruesome crimes were happy to pose for the cameras. They saw nothing wrong with their deeds. The recent release of a video of a tortured Papuan man (allegedly a freedom fighter) was illustrative of the nature of Indonesian brutality. The man had his genitals burned and soldiers ran a knife across his neck, but they merrily recorded their deeds.[15]

Several months after the lynching of Ahmadiyahs, the culprits were brought to trial. This is AHRC's report:

> (Hong Kong, 29 July 2011) Three to six months in prison was the shocking sentence given to the perpetrators of the mob killing of three Ahmadiyahs earlier this year. The remaining perpetrators will be released on the reading of the verdict on 23 August this year. Most of them will be released during the coming weeks. This lenient punishment and the conduct of the judges in the trial sends a clear signal to religious fundamentalists that they do not need to worry about the law and constitutional

> protection of minorities. 'The verdict and trial conduct does not meet national or international standards,' Wong Kai Shing, Executive Director of the Asian Human Rights Commission said. 'The lenient punishment will encourage more extremist action against religious minorities.' Wong added, 'the courts failed to enforce Indonesian law for the protection of citizens.' … At least one patrol car from Cikeusik sector police and 2 trucks from riot-control force (Dalmas) of Pandeglang district policemen were present and watched the violence, doing nothing to prevent it or apprehend the perpetrators. The shocking scenes were published in a video online sparking international outcry.[16]

The writer of online blog Ravespot wrote an outraged comment: 'None [of the 12 attackers] was charged with murder. None received a sentence stiffer than six months in jail. All will walk free in weeks. That's Indonesian justice and tolerance. It is tolerance of murder and mob rule.'[17]

More reactions flowed in, including a passionate piece by A. Lin Neumann published in the *Jakarta Globe*:

> I still cannot get one sound from the Feb. 6 Cikeusik mob attack on a handful of Ahmadiyah followers out of my head. At some point the shouting and mayhem, which millions have seen on YouTube, seems to subside as a lifeless body in the mud is beaten with wooden staves. There follows a series of sickening wet slaps against the corpse as a crowd shouts in approval.
>
> But that man and two other victims were not murdered, according to prosecutors who chose the lightest possible charges to throw up against the clearly identifiable suspects in the Banten province attack. On Thursday, a court made it official, handing out sentences of three to six months to 12 men accused of leading and carrying out the assault.
>
> Dani bin Misra, a 17-year-old, smashed a victim's skull with a stone; he was charged with manslaughter and got three months. The leader of the mob of about 1,000 people who attacked 20 Ahmadis, Idris bin Mahdani, was convicted of illegal possession of a machete and got five months and 15 days in jail.
>
> In other words, murder – organized, premeditated and captured on video – is not much more of a crime than stealing a bunch of bananas. In Indonesia, it appears, you can get away with murder, as long as the killing is done in the name of religion.[18]

TEMANGGUNG

Two days after the lynching of Ahmadiyah – on February 8, 2010 – a crowd in Temanggung, central Java mobbed the local courthouse and vandalized three churches after a former priest from Manado, who had allegedly insulted both Islam and Christianity in a pamphlet, had been given the maximum sentence of five years in prison. The protesters demanded the death penalty.

Approaching Temanggung, I noticed that police and military vehicles were everywhere. In the centre, armoured trucks and troop transporters blocked one another in front of the modest local police headquarters. Uniformed police and army personnel were patrolling all key corners and buildings, especially the churches. Their presence seems to be unnecessarily heavy, since the violence had ended by then.

'How many people were arrested?' I asked. In fact I knew the number from my sources – 14.

'Can't release the number', answered a high-ranking officer. 'It's still a secret.'

'What are the charges?' I tried again.

'Secret,' he replied.

The police station was right next to one of the churches damaged on February 8. Dozens of police officers were crammed into the tiny wooden guard's shack, smoking clove cigarettes and grinning at those who came to look. With such forces available, it was surprising to say the least that the mob had raged unchecked.

I first went to the Muslim religious leaders. I wanted to hear their side of the story. All that I knew was the outline from press coverage. The priest appeared to have been mildly deranged. By then living in Jakarta, he had come to visit his relatives living in Temanggung and distributed some copies of his pamphlet to local people. It apparently visually compared some symbols of Islam to the male and female reproductive organs. This was distasteful, but the five-year sentence seemed to me more than adequate in the light of sentences on Muslim provocateurs.

'What happened here is actually very different from what people saw on the news', explained the speaker of the Forum of United Muslims (Forum Umat Islam Bersatu), Taufiq Hartono:

> But even we don't know up to now what happened. The attacks were definitely provoked by some interests from outside. We don't know who began the destruction of the court. They were not

> people from Temanggung. None of them were from here. Judging by their dialects, the attackers were from Solo, Pekalongan, Kendal [all places in Central Java]; even from Jakarta. Our people just want to live in peace.

'Why didn't the local people who want to live in peace defend the churches?' I asked. After 20 years of writing about despicable violence in Indonesia, I was tired of being told about 'provocation'. Be it the rape of Chinese women in Solo or the burning of churches in Ambon, local people never accepted the responsibility for mob justice and atrocities. I did not get a clear answer.

I managed to sneak into the courthouse, which had by then been cleaned of debris. Soldiers guarded the entrance, and more than a dozen of them slept on cartons spread on the floor. After some wobbly attempts to appear official and get to their feet, the soldiers went back to sleep. Heat, humidity and the laziness cultivated for years seemed to have overwhelmed them.

The church near the police station looked much more battered than the courthouse. Statues had been desecrated. Half of the torso of Jesus was missing and so were substantial parts of the Virgin Mary. The electric organ was ruined. Several heads, including that of Jesus, had been cut off a wood carving of the Last Supper.

'Of course, there were local people among the attackers', said local priest Romo Dwinugraha Sulistya. He was remarkably composed in the circumstances:

> The mob streamed through the streets, destroying traffic signs and converting them to weapons. Some people were carrying swords and stone-throwing slings. Some were armed with cobblestones. All symbols of Christianity were destroyed: crosses, the Last Supper, statues of Jesus and Mary. All of our people – all Catholics – were crying when they entered the church. And not only Catholics, also Protestants, even some Muslims; people of all religions cried. At one point, I asked everybody to pray together.

Once again I asked about the book that had fired such destructive passions. One of the members of the Forum of United Muslims had given me a copy but I had not yet had time to read it. Father Sulistya said his assistant had spoke to the author, who had explained that he did not consider himself to be a priest any more. He still believed in Jesus, but not in the institution of the church. His pamphlet

compared Christianity and Islam, the Bible and the Koran. 'The first pages were fine,' Sulistya said, 'but further on the text deteriorated.' When I read it I agreed, but I still could not see why Muslims would see the need to persecute the writer of this badly written outpouring about a lost faith.

PASURUAN

Several days later, another brutal religious attack shook Indonesia. This time the victims were boys from the YAPI Islamic Boarding School. The *Jakarta Post* reported that 'A mob of 100 people attacked the boarding school in Pasuruan, East Java, on Tuesday, a day when Muslims in the country commemorate the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad.'[19] Four boys suffered serious head injuries after being beaten mercilessly by the mob, which had arrived on motorbikes. Security guards were injured, and parts of the school destroyed. It appeared that the crowd had got 'very angry' (a common description in Indonesia of the state of people who are about to kill or injure those who do not share the same race or religious belief) because they thought the school was run by Shias, who are the minority in predominantly Sunni Indonesia. In a bizarre twist, it was later claimed that the clerics at the school were actually only 'sympathetic' to Shias, but taught Sunni doctrine.

As the chain of attacks was shaking the island of Java, I drove to the even more conservative island of Madura, across the strait from Surabaya, to try to get a sense of the wider mood and religious temperature in Indonesia. I visited the enormous and lavish Syekh Muhammad Kholil Mosque in the city of Bangkalan, and asked caretaker Mohammad Hasan his opinion of the events. With no hesitation he replied:

> Ahmadiyah members should be killed. It is about faith. In Indonesia, we don't want Ahmadiyah because it deviates from the teaching of the Sharia. They deserved to be killed because they are destroying people's faith. When it comes to burning churches, I am against it. We are a peaceful religion.

THE WEST, CLERICS AND INDONESIAN ISLAM

For many years there was little press coverage in Indonesia, and less worldwide, of many recent religious attacks. There was almost no

coverage of the burning of churches, of the violence at the National Monument (Monas), of continuous religious terror in Poso in Sulawesi (including the gruesome decapitation of three Christian girls on October 29, 2005), of forced Islamization in Papua, and the religious killings in the Moluccas. But the problem is a huge one. Human Rights Watch (HRW) claims that, according to the Communion of Churches in Indonesia, more than 430 churches have been attacked since SBY took office in 2004.[20]

In addition, the secular clauses of the Indonesian constitution were ignored and violated by the introduction of sharia law in Aceh, Tangerang and other provinces. It was becoming difficult to imagine what might change the Western paradigm of Indonesia as a 'tolerant and secular society'. But the attacks in February 2011 changed the atmosphere, and warning signals began to appear in several mainstream Western publications and on news sites.

For example, a headline in the *Huffington Post* on February 14, 2011 read 'Indonesia – land of tolerance or terror?' The article began with this summary:

> Indonesia once hailed itself as a moderate, diverse nation that protects freedom of religion for all its citizens, with a national motto 'Bhinneka Tunggal Ika,' meaning unity in diversity. Three months ago, President Obama praised Indonesia as a model of religious tolerance when he said that Indonesia and the United States share principles of unity and tolerance. The grim reality, however, is that Indonesia is losing the right to call itself a tolerant nation that promotes or protects diversity. Instead, due to failed policies, its government has allowed a real militant threat to grow within its borders.

Opposition may yet grow from Indonesian clerics and religious leaders themselves, some of whom are still inspired by the social secularism of the deposed but revered President Abdurrahman Wahid, who passed away on December 30, 2009.

In his house in Banda Aceh, Professor Yusny Saby from Islamic University (IAIN) Ar-Raniry spoke to me with sadness and bitterness about many Indonesian Muslims:

> We always have religion but not necessarily spirituality. Many in Indonesia claim that Islam is the solution, but we Muslims often create the problems ourselves. Look at our country now. It is said that corruption is *haram* [forbidden]. But corruption became an

> essential part of our culture. And nobody does anything about it – there are no role models.[21]

'The problem with the majority of Indonesian Muslims is that they don't have their own opinion,' explained Huda Ismail. 'They follow what their leaders say or follow what the Qur'an says or the *hadith* says. With this kind of attitude, they don't exercise critical thinking at all. Therefore, when their leaders say we are moderate and tolerant followers of Islam, most of the followers will say yes and think that is the case.'

Even some former jihadi cadres have started to speak openly about the problems in the ranks of Indonesian Islam. Yusuf, as he is known now, is a former member of Jemaah Islamiyah. He spent five years in jail for assisting the JW Marriott Hotel bombers in Jakarta in 2003, and was released in 2008. In June 2011, he attended the Summit Against Violent Extremism (SAVE) in Dublin, Ireland. Ireland shocked him:

> I went to a country where the majority of the people are not Muslims. It was an eye-opener for me. I am in awe that people there are so polite. They smile easily, and the cities are really clean. I can say that even though most of them are not Muslims, they do practise what Islam ordered. And I can say that even though the majority of people in Indonesia are Muslims, we don't practise what is taught by Islam in our daily lives.[22]

Commenting on the upsurge of violence, academic and Catholic priest Romo Barskara T. Wardaya from the Center for History and Political Ethics (PUSDEP) of Sanata Dharma University in Yogyakarta offered his thoughts on the issue:

> Recent violence against religious groups in West and Central Java reminds us of two things. One: in Indonesia religions have the potential to be a constructive power for the nation. Two: but at the same time certain groups to serve their own interests could manipulate religion. Evidence indicates that point number two is a strong suspect behind the violence. Whoever is responsible must be brought to justice.[23]

But who is behind the attacks? As mentioned earlier, outbursts of violence and intolerance in Indonesia always seemed to be blamed on provocateurs, invisible interests and hands. And the owners of

the real hands holding machetes, cutting into people's flesh, the mouths screaming insults and threats in an outburst, are very rarely punished.

Wahid once told me on record that he knew who blew up the JW Marriott Hotel in Jakarta in 2003. He claimed they were not Islamic fundamentalists but members of security forces (the exact branch is perhaps better not named here) trying to create a justification for more funding. But although this president of the country was confident of that, no one was arrested and tried. The problem remains that Indonesian society is exceptionally passive when it comes to fighting injustice, especially if the perpetrators belong to the majority. Twitter and social networks are very popular now among the middle and upper classes in Indonesia, and people tweet their outrage when this kind of event takes place, but they do not move from tweets to street demonstrations, to real calls for action.

Anthropologist Andrew Beatty touched on these issues when he wrote about a Java that is disappearing:

> This was an island where people of radically different ideology – orthodox Muslims, Hinduised mystics and animistic peasants – managed to live together in harmony. But the Java we first knew and the Java we left in 1997 were different places. The transformation – long prepared but still unexpected – was quite sudden and shocking. A puritan, ideologically driven Islam had made rapid progress, pushing aside older traditions, disturbing an ancient pact that allowed ancestral spirits and pre-Islamic deities a place among the prayer-houses. Like other villagers, we had to make our compromises and find a way to live with the new dogmatism. But the gentle world that we had known – of Muslims and mystics, of dancers and shadow plays – was in eclipse. And with the rise of an assertive piety, neighbourhoods and communities were splitting. Inside every family a struggle over the faith was taking place. And not only in Java. Repeated wherever Muslims live, this struggle will decide the future shape of the Islamic world.
>
> Indonesia, the largest and most diverse Muslim nation – with Java at its heart – shows us better than anywhere how to live peacefully with cultural difference. That diversity and respect for pluralism are now under threat.[24]

Loudspeakers now broadcast all that happens inside mosques, bombarding entire neighbourhoods with hours of loud noise. There

is no time to concentrate, no time to think; religion is everywhere, self-confident and bombastic. Secularism, it appears, has died.

Hypocrisy is everywhere: religious tourism is on the increase and it is now common among the middle and upper classes to fly every year, ever several times a year, to Mecca, something that would be looked down upon in most Muslim nations. Every year trips to Saudi Arabia siphon from Indonesia billions of dollars that could have alleviated the poverty of millions of desperate families. Those Saudi trips, food orgies in expensive restaurants after the breaking of the fast during the fasting month (the time when Muslims are supposed to understand and share the suffering of the poor), the construction of enormous mosques: religion itself has been infiltrated with the vulgarity of a *nouveau riche* culture. Meanwhile millions of children are suffering from malnutrition, running around barefoot or worse.

10

CULTURE, EDUCATION AND INTELLECTUAL LIFE

> They arrested all the artists, because the New Order system – the Suharto regime – destroyed political dissent to the roots.
>
> Djokopekik, Indonesian painter

Before taking a taxi after the opening night of *Terlena,* my documentary film on the 1965 coup in Indonesia at Village East Cinema, New York, publisher Dan Simon[1] commented,' When Pramoedya Ananta Toer passes away, the last cultural link between Indonesia and the world will be severed.' He was referring to the greatest writer in Indonesia and arguably in Southeast Asia, the author of the *Buru Quartet* and the most outspoken critic of Indonesian and Javanese culture. His books were burned and banned, and Pram (his nickname) spent years in prisons and concentration camps during Suharto's regime.

Simon was also referring to the fact that the world is not familiar with any other thinker from Indonesia, even though it is the fourth most populous nation in the world.

Before his death, Pram shared his thoughts with us in the book *Exile*, his last bitter testimony about the state of his country. When I asked him about 'the great Indonesian culture', which has been systematically destroyed, he replied:

> A great Indonesian culture? I disagree! Indonesian culture is poor. Of what does it really consist? A real Indonesian culture has not yet been born. What we know as Indonesian culture is just something we can describe as local or provincial cultures. What is Indonesian culture? There is some literature, true. That can be considered as Indonesian culture, because it uses the Indonesian language. What else is there? There are only some local cultural forms, like Balinese dancing. Every province has some folklore, especially Aceh. But culture?
>
> For the last hundred years, Java controlled everything. In my opinion, the young generation has to create a new culture

> and forget about the old stuff. It hurts to put it like that, but it's true.
>
> We were occupied for centuries, because our culture couldn't match and surpass that of the occupiers, because it couldn't fight them. Our values were low, too. Indonesians constantly glorify their culture, but I keep asking, 'What's there to glorify?'

To any objective observer who has travelled through and understood this archipelago, it ought to be obvious that Indonesia has lost its voice; it has become intellectually deaf and mute. If Pram was correct, it never had a voice to lose.

The Indonesian archipelago hosts a cacophony of sounds that hardly amount to music, except for the great Javanese and Balinese classical *gamelan* music and the Sundanese Angklung orchestra. It counts dozens of languages but there has never been a poem or even much coherent prose written in many of them. It has hundreds of cultural celebrities but not one great film or a novel apart from those written by Pram, who used to say that five pages were the maximum he could read of any contemporary Indonesian writer. There is not one Indonesian cultural personality (again apart from Pram) who has entered the consciousness of the global intellectual community. No Indonesian writer, musician, film maker could be identified by a typical well-informed individual in Buenos Aires, Cape Town, New York, Calcutta, Beijing or Tokyo.

Not one Indonesian thinker is in the vanguard, shaping the intellectual and cultural life of Asia and the world. No one from this vast archipelago provides a powerful voice suggesting new ways forward for humanity.

And yet there used to be culture in this area. There was more spirituality and less religion, and there were various influential art forms. Village stages were found everywhere, where people would entertain and educate, even provoke their audience, discussing diverse topics like the price of rice, the ruthlessness of rulers and the hardship of life. This unique theatre form was called *ketoprak*.

Bondan Nusantara, the greatest *ketoprak* artist from Yogyakarta, recalled:

> Before 1965, *ketoprak* was a very popular form of people's art in Central Java, West Java and even in Jakarta. It was the flagship of Javanese culture. In those times, *ketoprak* was much more 'flamboyant' because of the involvement of important individuals from Lekra, who helped popularize it all over the country.[2]

Leading anthropologist Andrew Beatty visited Javanese philosophy in his book *A Shadow Falls: In the heart of Java*:

> The way into mysticism for the ordinary villager was not through books or lessons or meetings with remarkable men. It could begin with a baby's cry or a plate of red and white porridge. It lay before you, half-concealed in the routines of everyday life. The merest question could open the way. And once you had made the shift of perspective, things genuinely looked different; and there was a logic which told you how to proceed, how to deepen your understanding without the fear of getting things wrong. For all its wordplay and extravagant numerology, Javanism is a philosophy grounded in experience.
>
> This is something Western scholars miss. They begin among the manuscripts of the royal courts in Solo and Yogya or the oriental collections of Leiden University, sifting the yellowing texts from Indian and Arabic sources. (Java is always the terminus of cultural diffusion, never the origin.) They hunt for systems and conceptual networks. What they are after is an abstract spiritual geometry, a metaphysical pass-key giving entry to any text, however cryptic – which would be fine if Javanese mystics were scholars like themselves …
>
> Javanese philosophy, as Purwadi described it, wasn't something to be taught, like Islam or constitutional history; even less imposed: it was found within.[3]

This was the opposite of what Pram insisted during several conversations. To him Javanism equalled fascism, or at least blind obedience to the authority. He also believed that because of Javanism, it was very easy to colonize and rule the entire island of Java and the archipelago. Is it possible for two fine thinkers to hold such contrary, but also accurate, views? Or could it be that what Pram described was actually Javanese culture after it had been raped, spat upon and rolled in the dirt by foreign and treasonous local forces?

On closer examination, it seemed to me that the views of these two thinkers were actually not so far apart. In correspondence, Beatty broadly confirmed this:

> On reflection, I do agree with what you say about Pramoedya's views concerning the fascist tendency in Indonesia. (I was being cautious about 'my' mystics, who are a pretty decent lot; but there were several high-ranking Suharto associates with mystical

connections – partly a way of not being Islamic, I think.) The FPI is only the most blatant recent example of fascism. But the fondness for uniforms, the bleating of slogans, the proliferation of militias, and the Islamist ranting – all amount to a kind of fascism. Fortunately, most ordinary Javanese are not like this.

Another sinister element in the fascist mix is victimisation. You can see this at work in the mob killings that took place in the Banyuwangi area in 1997–98 or the intermittent lynchings that take place all over Java. People join in knowing they won't be caught. You may have seen the horrific videos on YouTube of the lynching of Ahmadiyah people in West Java last year – bystanders stepping forward to raise a stick. When I ask people about the lynching of sorcerers, they always excuse the sadism of the attacks by saying that the sorcerers are invulnerable and feel no pain. How does this square with the explicit ideals of *rukun* [harmony] and empathy? The paradox of Java – and what separates Pram's violent view from my own gentler portrait – is that there really are two sides, Jekyll and Hyde: all calmness and harmony and tolerance, and then a sudden access of horrific violence.[4]

EDUCATION

The educational system in Indonesia remains one of the worst and most underfunded in the world. The dire state of education is, to many, the main reason why the local elites and foreign neocolonial forces get away with robbing the country so easily. It seems that there is a purposeful design to keep the population in the dark and in a state of submissiveness, using both the inadequate educational system and excessive religiousness.

To keep educational standards at the lowest possible level helps the regime to maintain full control over the people. The great majority of Indonesians do not even realize how desperately poor their nation is and how shocking is the contrast with neighbouring countries. With functional illiteracy widespread (unofficially, well over 50 per cent in some parts of the country), the fact that there is plunder of everything – from the nation's natural resources to public spaces – is too complex for the majority of the people to comprehend.

Only the elites travel abroad, and therefore are able to compare Indonesia with other countries – and they have little to complain about, since the feudal system provides an underpaid and obedient labour force of nannies, maids, drivers, gardeners and cooks.

The history of Indonesian education after the 1965 coup is sinister, truly horrifying. Some testimonies indicate that as many as 40 per cent of all Indonesian teachers were killed or 'disappeared' in the period 1965–66, and soldiers were employed in classrooms to fill the gaps. According to Saskia Wieringa, an affiliated senior researcher at the University of Amsterdam, 'In 1966, when the killings subsided and people were trying to come back to normal life, they found that the whole generations of teachers had been wiped out and schools could not be opened.'[5]

Benedict Anderson argued:

> Yet there is one other phenomenon that needs to be noted. Indonesia's educational system today is mostly a dreary swamp. Up until perhaps the early 1960s, primary and secondary school-teachers were, even if miserably paid, respected local figures, partly for their energetic role in overcoming widespread illiteracy, and partly for the contributions many had made to the colonial-era nationalist movement. The everyday word for 'teacher', *guru*, still had an impressive traditional aura. During the 1965–66 massacres, the occupational group that was proportionately hardest hit consisted of just such primary and secondary schoolteachers. Their emergency replacements were a mass of uninterested, unqualified placemen and placewomen who wanted a civil service job at all costs, and, of course, were completely loyal to the regime that hired them. It was this phalanx that really brought the pervasive miasma of civil servant-style corruption into schools – bribery, 'tea-money', embezzlement of school budgets and so on.[6]

'Indonesia is arguably Asia's least well-educated country, and the government is largely to blame,' reported Bill Guerin in *Asia Times* on August 31, 2006:

> With 30 per cent of its 242 million population of school-going age, the world's largest Muslim country ranks lowest among its Asian neighbours in terms of public education expenditure. This year China will spend 13 per cent of its total national budget on education, India 12 per cent, the Philippines 17 per cent, Malaysia 20 per cent, Hong Kong 23 per cent and Thailand 27 per cent. Indonesia's education budget this year, in comparison, represents less than 10 per cent of the government's budget, while the draft budget for 2007 proposes a tiny upgrade to 10.2 per cent of total national spending.

According to the most recent data available, spending on education in Indonesia (as a percentage of GDP) was only 1.2 per cent, third lowest in the world after Equatorial Guinea (0.6 per cent) and Ecuador (1 per cent).[7] Indonesia is moving even further down the ladder, as it has becomes obvious that in recent years Ecuador, now ruled by a socialist government, has revisited its priorities and is improving social services, spending more on education and health.

These figures cannot be relied upon, though, since even Indonesia's population is not known with accuracy (see page 53). Making a similar argument, a former student activist and alumnus of the Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB), Harry Wibowo,[8] claimed that:

> 50 million Indonesian children are not recognized by the state as citizens! The state circumvents its obligations to register their births. We would not read it in the news but we got valid data from one of the ministries. The birth of those 50 million children was not registered and so legally they are not the citizens of this republic .... As a result, all those children will have problems entering elementary schools and their civil rights will be limited.[9]

In an interview for *Exile*, Pramoedya Ananta Toer did not hide his disgust with the level of Indonesian education:

> Families are not educated, so they can't educate their children. That's why the Javanese are not productive; all they know is how to consume. If one can't produce anything, he or she becomes a servant. There is no identity without production! Indonesia is a nation of coolies, so one thing it exports well is people: it has become one of the largest exporters of cheap labour in the world. They can do only things that they are told to do and take orders from anyone who is willing to pay them. You can forget about creativity: creativity is something they lack absolutely, but creativity is not the first step. Before reaching it, they would first have to learn how to produce.
>
> Indonesians still believe in myths. Rational thinking comes from abroad, and Indonesians are only beginning to learn about its existence. Our common people are still painfully backward. Compared with Malaysia, we are way behind. I see Indonesian thought in a constant process of rotting, and I can't do anything about it. I can influence things only when I'm invited to speak;

> the last time when I spoke in public, it was exactly on this topic: the low level of Indonesian culture. Even after I'd delivered my speech, the people in the auditorium still couldn't understand what I was talking about. They continue to believe that their culture is high. They keep glorifying it.

Uneducated and uninformed masses do not know how to ask pointed questions; they cannot express their grievances and formulate demands. They cannot aim at reversing power structures, using either bullets or ballots.

The state of Indonesian schools is appalling, and the quality of teachers extremely poor. Some schools in Indonesia are staffed with teachers who have to take a second job in order to make a decent living. 'Non-permanent' teachers earn only US$50.00 a month. The salaries of the permanent teachers are a more reasonable US$300 or more, but for example in Klaten regency, central Java, only 5,000 out of 11,000 teachers are permanent.[10] The average salaries of teachers and professors are even lower than in many countries of sub-Saharan Africa. For illustration, Kenyan teachers in primary and secondary schools earn between US$1,700 and US$14,400 per year.

Not only is the quality of teaching bad, there is no standardized curriculum. An increasing number of religious schools do not even bother to coordinate with the Ministry of Education. Ahmad Syaikhu, Arabic language teacher at the Madrasah Azziyadah in East Jakarta, explained:

> As *madrasah*, we are coordinated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, not with the Ministry of Education. We have our own curriculum and we only follow some parts of the Ministry of Education curriculum so that our students could participate in the national exams. For instance, we teach history, but mostly history of the Islamic culture and religion.[11]

Private, religious and even public schools do not always respect the set curriculum, or as often happens, the quality of their staff is too low to implement it.

A British professor who has been teaching in Indonesia for many years (he asked not to be identified) has intimate insight into the system:

> The curricula are amended with each incoming national administration. Following *reformasi*, for a brief period during the

> presidency of Megawati Sukarnoputri, the daughter of first president Sukarno, the history curriculum was amended to give the now generally accepted version of the genocide in 1965–67. However, with the election of the current president … the revisionist Suhartoist version of events has been reinstated. It will take at least a generation or two for young people to write their own history, to truly bring about a *reformasi* which does not reflect the inculcation of 'facts' provided by their teachers and parents, themselves products of the Suharto era.[12]

Even as Chilean and Colombian students have been paralyzing their countries throughout 2011, demanding free education from primary to tertiary levels, and even as rebellious student leaders like the young Chilean Camilla Vallejo are enjoying greater popularity in their countries than any member of the government, Indonesian students and the Indonesian public are accepting in silence a low quality of education, murderously high tuition fees for universities, and 'hidden fees' for primary schools. In Jakarta, protests against the low quality of education are virtually unknown.

In Indonesia, the monthly tuition fee for an elementary private school is over US$80.00 per child, and for secondary school approximately US$90.00. The 'hidden cost' for free education is around Rp.100,000 (US$11.00) a month, a sum many families cannot afford.

Even in the religious schools there is a fee for education. According to Ahmad Syaiku:

> Out of 400 students who live in dormitories, only 10 per cent get a scholarship. But our tuition is cheap. I think it might be the cheapest in the city. For 7–9 grades, for example, our tuition fee is only Rp.55,000 (US$6.00) per month.

That, of course, does not include lodging, food and other supplies.

On May 25, 2010, the *Financial Times* reported:

> With some of its human development indicators on par with sub-Saharan Africa, the country needs assistance if it wants to stand alongside China and India as an Asian economic tiger.
>
> Fewer than 2 per cent of Indonesia's 235 million people have studied beyond high school, and there's a 50 per cent school dropout rate by the age of 15 ….
>
> Indonesia also faces a challenge in meeting many of its

> other Millennium Development Goals. More than 100 million Indonesians live on $2 a day or less. But amid the numerous challenges with poverty and development, education is a priority for Indonesia. It needs to remain so if Indonesia wants to be mentioned in the same breath as China and India.[13]

Teachers' salaries are often not paid on time because of the incompetence or criminality of local bureaucracies. The school buildings they work in are often in a decrepit condition because of 'budgetary constraints'. As this book went to press, the British professor I quoted earlier (p. 208) passed on to me a report that 'at least 20,368 elementary schools in the province of Central Java, which has a population of 33 million, were in various states of disrepair due to old age, thereby affecting teaching and learning activities'.

There are literally tens of thousands of Indonesians who hold PhDs from prestigious universities in the United States, Europe and Japan. At closer examination though, it becomes obvious that many diplomas are attained through a foreign quota system for scholarships, and some are paid for – and not always with clean money. It is difficult sometimes to believe that those who claim to have foreign higher degrees can have met the usual requirements. I have met several Indonesians with PhDs from Japanese universities who did not speak either Japanese or English well enough to read a newspaper.

Diplomas and titles guarantee very little in the way of solid knowledge in Indonesia, and many are not in the fields that are essential for the development of the nation. In a written interview, TriDjoko Wahyono, senior lecturer at Bina Nusantara University, explained that 'The total number of new engineers in Indonesia will not be enough to support even the "Master Plan for Acceleration and Expansion of Indonesia Economic Development 2011–2025"'[14] – an outline by the present government that seems more abstract than concrete. Several bureaucrats have also made public their prediction that Indonesia will need up to 175,000 engineers per annum to move forward, while it produces only 37,000.

According to a July 2, 2010 article in the *Jakarta Post:*

> Even though in total, researchers in Indonesia are 42,722, the largest among ASEAN members, but if it is accounted per million inhabitants, Indonesia with 199 researchers per million people is still below Singapore (5713), Malaysia (503) and Thailand (292). By using statistical data of UN-ESCAP (2009), the Indonesia

position is also still lower than Iran (947) and Pakistan (310).

Indonesia is also regarded very weak in assessing the number of registered patents. In 2008, regarding to the KBE report, the number of registered patents at American-based USPTO, Indonesia only registered 19 patents. It is far less compared with Singapore (450), Malaysia (168) and Thailand (40).

Indonesia is also the only major country in the world whose citizens have never won a Nobel Prize in any category.

THE ARTS

The biggest concentration of 'avant-garde' art galleries in Indonesia is in Jakarta's largest mall, which is called Grand Indonesia. That art is located in the Mecca of consumerism is not so surprising, because in this country, most modern art is commercial in orientation. It is designed to be popular, not to convey a social message or express outrage over the state of the nation.

In August 2011, I was wandering through the lower floor of Grand Indonesia, searching for an art exhibition, when I encountered a small chamber orchestra, making an unusual (and not particularly successful) attempt to perform Western classical music. Their chairs were set behind a statue that showed the twisted body of a dog in the act of urinating into its own wide-open mouth. This kind of facile shock-provocation passes for avant-garde serious art in Indonesia.

I had often heard that Leo Kristi and Iwan Fals were the two greatest contemporary Indonesian singers, and that they were given to inserting provocative statements into the lyrics of their popular songs. ('Popular' here means well-liked, not related to American pop music.) I listened to Iwan Fals and liked some of his songs, although only a few of them made a lasting impression on me.

In August 2011, Leo Kristi and his *Konser Rakyat* – his supporting musicians – performed at the North Sumatra Pavilion at Taman Mini Indonesia Indah (TMII), a kitsch recreation of Indonesian heritage on a miniature scale, 'constructed' by Suharto's wife Ms Tien (also known as 'Tien ten per cent' because of her greed and corruption). No tickets were required and no reservation was necessary, so I went along. After taking off my shoes, I walked up the stairs of an overblown replica of a traditional North Sumatran house (TMII is supposed to show miniature facsimiles of the originals, but this house was a monstrous exaggeration). In the

room where the concert was to take place, people were sitting on the wooden floor. They were all holding cameras, mobile phones or video recorders. Anticipation was high. Finally the star came onto the podium: a small man in his sixties, wearing dark glasses, with a gorgeous young girl at his side.

The cameras clicked and several men holding video recorders fought for space as the artists began to sing, but in spite of the general enthusiastic reception, I was surprised and disappointed. Kristi and his sidekick sang a love song, followed by another, and another. I had hoped for some of the social commentary that is so badly needed in Indonesia: for something about the slums, the open sewers, the dark dirty alleys between the shiny shopping malls and luxury hotels. But I was wrong. All Indonesian singers are, apparently, always in the mood for love.

Later a classically beautiful woman in her late fifties ascended the stage. This was Titi Ajeng, Kristi's former vocalist. The audience exploded with euphoria. Her voice was silky and beautiful, and her repertoire, it seemed, was to everyone's liking: not original songs about her own country, but familiar English and American evergreens.

In August 2011, I attended the Mid-Year Concert at Aula Simfonia Jakarta. I have written before that there is 'no permanent and active theatre or concert hall in Jakarta', and I always get the reply that there is at least one, Aula Simfonia. This over-decorated hall is actually set in a huge private religious compound, the Reformed Cultural Center. Its publicity describes it as 'dedicated to God and to the Indonesian people'. The 'people' this refers to can only be the rich, however. Prices for the concerts that take place every two months range from US$25 to US$150.

The cost is reflected in the audience. Everyone seemed to be from the upper middle (judging by world standards, not the unreal standards discussed on pages 57–8) and upper classes. They wore real designer clothes, not the fake ones from Bandung 'factory outlets', and in some cases, reflecting world fashion trends rather than local styles. There is no sidewalk leading to the centre, so everyone drives there, or more precisely, is driven there.

Chairs surround the stage, and portraits of European composers (no one from the wider world music scene) stare intensely at the audience. The one of Mozart looks suspiciously similar to the one on 'Mozart Balls' chocolates (widely available at upmarket Jakarta supermarkets). There are pseudo-Roman columns, gilded statues and enormous organs.

The concert opened with a student's interpretation of a Bach sonata for unaccompanied cello followed by Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto in E-minor. The first 30 seconds were passable, but the quality quickly deteriorated: the orchestra seemed to be labouring under a burden of insufficient talent and practice. Only the heroic intervention of the conductor brought them back to the safe waters of tolerable mediocrity.

After the intermission, 'Dr' Stephen Tong, founder of the Aula Simfonia, conducted Schumann's Piano Concerto in A minor. This was much better, but the audience began to lose concentration and turned to their mobile phones. The standard Jakartesque infantile giggle began to interfere with Schumann's musical confession of his love for Clara. The audience were now poking each other with their elbows, pointing to the screens of smart phones, text messaging. Jakarta's elites were on an outing.

Looking round, something didn't feel right, but it took a while for me to figure out what it was. It was Ramadan, but there was not a single headscarf in the entire concert hall. The god worshipped here was also clearly not the god of the Indonesian religious majority. It stood in stark contrast to the multiculturalism of Petronas concert hall in Kuala Lumpur.

ARTISTS AND INTELLECTUALS

Arahmaiani Feisal is one of the very few important Indonesian artists, but she hardly spends any time in her native land, dividing her life mainly between Europe and China, particularly Tibet, for which she has developed an affinity. When she comes back to Indonesia, she mostly tutors, trying to influence contemporary artists in the historic city of Yogyakarta. But frustration often overwhelms her. The feelings of hopelessness and solitude become too strong, and then she knows she has to leave.

'Indonesia intellectuals?' She shrugged her shoulders. We were in the city of Bandung, drinking wine.[15]

> Sadly, I can't expect much from them. During the Suharto's 'New Order', the intellectual life of Indonesia was thoroughly fucked up. People were manipulated and by now they have no idea how to evaluate things; they don't know what truth is. They are used to lies. They are used to telling and writing lies, as well as reading them. And, what can you expect from intellectuals if they have no habit of telling the truth, to be

> honest? And, without honesty it is very different to achieve clarity.
>
> First of all, there is this habit here of not being truthful and not seeing reality as it is. Reality was and still is constantly manipulated. We have a problem in defining reality, which at the end leads to acute lack of clarity.
>
> The whole society is paralyzed because we have to live in deceit and dishonesty! And if one decides to be honest, struggling against these conditions, one has to learn how to suffer from loneliness.

Feisal is used to sadness and loneliness: her lifestyle and way of thinking have led to countless confrontations with Javanism, and the self-righteous majority has castigated her. She complains about the inflexibility of Indonesia, about its unwillingness to be influenced by, or even to tolerate, people who are even marginally different. Though she has managed to tear herself away from mediocrity, it was at the price of becoming a stranger in her own land, losing almost all roots and cultural allegiances:

> I think first of all my life experience as being a woman who has been denied the right to her daughter put me in a different position from 'normal' Indonesian woman. Second: my lifestyle that is nomadic allows me to see other 'reality' (culturally, socially and politically) – it gives me an opportunity to see the world and to compare. And since I don't have what is traditionally considered a family, I could spend full time focusing on my work and on reading on any subjects that interest me. In a way, this is a luxury for most Indonesians. But it allows me to be critical and somehow rebellious if not anarchistic.
>
> This different experience and lifestyle are filling me with freedom, but also with loneliness. I am not the only one who feels like this, of course. But we are a very small minority – the intellectuals who actually think; creative people with integrity.

Then she returned to the most painful subject of all, the state of Indonesian artistic and intellectual creativity:

> How come things got so bad? I know it is a reality, but why? What we discussed earlier – what Dan Simon said about Pramoedya dying and the last bridge between Indonesia and the world collapsing – I understand and fully agree with him.

> I see in what direction intellectual life is developing here. I have to say, it is all mediocrity here. But I cannot just be sad. I keep thinking, What can be done? What could I do? Whenever I come here, I try to work with young artists and intellectuals. But it is very difficult. Manipulation of history and distortion of it had an enormous effect on the young generation – now they are blind! They feel satisfied with their little pop world. For most of them, it is sufficient. And the surroundings are never supportive in this country; never supportive of anyone who aims higher. So, on the one hand, I want to do something for this country, but it's usually not gratifying; it is not stimulating, it is even boring. And after being discouraged too often, I once again run away, because, after all, I need intellectuality and spirituality in order to create.
>
> Whom do we have left here; are there any great Indonesian writers, painters, film makers, thinkers? There is nobody. Whom do they promote as the greatest one now? Gunawan Mohamad [a writer and poet, founder and editor of *Tempo* magazine], and you know, he is just so-so, not of any great calibre. This country cannot be compared to China, which I feel is such a creative place.

Nobody who is great in such an enormous country? Nobody, while even poorer Nigeria produces some of the greatest novels; when Indian writers are producing tremendous works of fiction and non-fiction? I have to agree with her.

But there are some exceptions to the rule, and Feisal herself is an important one. There is a good Balinese writer, Putu Oka Sukanta. Linda Christanty, former PRD militant, is also an exception when it comes to Indonesian letters – shrewd and politically engaged. She commented:

> Indonesia had Pram and Rendra, but good writers are lately far in between and both of them are gone. Some people thought that Gunawan Mohamad was a decent columnist. A long time ago, he created the magazine *Tempo*, pushing the government to grant journalists the freedom of expression. But it was never 'Gunawan Mohammad versus Suharto': his journalists, yes, but not him. And lately, in SBY time, he supported the government. He was even behind the successful election campaign of SBY and definitely behind his vice-president Boediono.

Christanty and I, old friends, were sitting in the café in the lobby of the Hermes Palace hotel in Banda Aceh.[16] She continued:

> Actually, many people would hate to hear it, but Pram was the only great writer this country produced. In my opinion, a great writer has to write about and understand his or her society; a writer has to be a leader.

We both agreed that Indonesian writers should recall the simple words of Czech poet Jaroslav Seifert, Nobel laureate in Literature: a man of lyrical verse, who once failed to contain his frustration and barked at the full session of the Union of Czech writers: 'The writer should be the conscience of his own nation …. If anyone else omits, or decides not to pronounce the truth, it can be understood: it can be simply considered as a tactical manoeuvre. If the writer withholds the truth, he is a liar.'

In the visual arts, resistance and sometimes even artistic expression are still alive. The best Indonesia has to offer is a group of ageing masters from the pre-1965 era called 'Sanggar Bumi Tarung' – some of them self-defined socialist realists. Most of the eleven artists (including such great names as Amrus Natalsya, Adrianus Gumelar, Misbach Tamrin and Hardjija Pudjanadi) went through camps and prisons, through torture, humiliation, prohibitions and travel bans, but they continued to work, documenting the decline of their nation, constructing a tremendous testimony, a memory for future luckier generations.

While in the 1980s and 1990s the local and foreign artists in Yogyakarta and Bali who were embraced by the regime – like Affandi and Antonio Blanco – were nurturing their egos and painting erotic fantasies and colourful hallucinations, the most famous of the Sanggar Bumi Tarung group, Djokopekik, was unleashing his wrath against the elites, the military, and also against the complacent people of Indonesia. Some of his epic canvases are enormous – they tell stories about the coup, about the spoiled hopes during the struggle for independence, about Indonesian cities divided by elevated highways with appalling slums underneath. 'He is like Picasso and Diego Rivera in one,' exclaimed Australian artist George Burchett when he visited Djokopekik's studio.

Djokopekik's veteran soldiers are abandoned and alone. His young girls are sacrificed – forced into horrible marriages – to old religious men. His people often lose human form and turn into monkeys. Suharto's regime is depicted as a tremendous and decomposing swine. The boots of the soldiers violate the masses. Misery is everywhere.

It is paradoxical that the Indonesian public will never see most

Photo 10.1 Djokopekik, arguably the greatest living Indonesian painter, in his studio in Kasihan village outside Yogyakarta

of these great canvases. Identified as brilliant by several rich collectors in Jakarta, they were purchased and locked in private guarded condominiums, where they are likely to stay forever. Some now decorate corporate meeting rooms. But I was lucky enough to be given access to the most important works by one collector, and managed to film the canvases for a future documentary film, hoping that at least in this way these great works will reach the public.

Some political and social awareness is beginning to penetrate the Indonesian arts once again. For instance, in 2011 the Semarang Contemporary Art Gallery exhibited powerful and disturbing works by the talented young Indonesian painter Maryanto, who is based in Yogyakarta. His huge canvases depicted enormous machinery, industrial landscapes and waste encircling humble villages and urban slums, whose inhabitants have been changed into animals. There are no human inhabitants, just beavers and monkeys, cats and bunnies. Maryanto's world is grey and horrible. At closer examination, it is a pure nightmare. In many ways, it is a merciless depiction of the reality in which the majority of Indonesian people are sentenced to live.

I wrote to Maryanto and he replied by email:

Actually, it was unintentional that my visual stories have a

> political message, but I painted from my own experience. I grew up in a place similar to those you see on my canvases. And also what helped, maybe, was my reading of Latin American novels, about stories of lower classes and their struggle. I always admired Pramoedya's novels.[17]

Another gallery, the Galeri Mon Decor, has showed work by Nisan Kristiyanto, in a way a softer, elegant echo to Maryanto's work. His work contrasts beautiful living trees and dead numbered logs.

REMEMBERING A LOST CULTURE

Women from the Swara Bineka of Wanodja Binangkit (formerly known as Ansamble Gembira) were gathering in the Kalibata neighbourhood in South Jakarta. Before 1965, some of them were famous, recording socialist songs full of zeal and enthusiasm, calling for building the nation and for the fight against corruption. In those days their group was called Gembira.

When I arrived on my visit the women were browsing through old photos. After a while, they began to sing.

Despite the terrible past, despite the horrors that some of them had to endure, they had never lost their passion and their optimism. Working with Pramoedya Ananta Toer, with the painters of Sanggar Bumi Tarung and with these women, I often sensed that these people, now in their sixties, seventies and eighties, are actually much more wholehearted, optimistic, productive and even amusing than the young Indonesians, raised on a gloomy and monotonous diet of cheap pop, Facebook and mass entertainment.

In the emotional wasteland of today's Indonesia, the artists from the old generation – those who survived the anti-cultural onslaught of the 'New Order' and *reformasi* periods – often appear shockingly normal and human compared with the lobotomized masses. Reclining in lazy chairs and on sofas, the women of Wanodja Binangkit hummed old Chinese songs, as well as 'Moscow Nights' in broken Russian. They couldn't all remember the lyrics, but their voices carried on, illuminating the deep humanity of the long lost years of Indonesia, a place that once existed but is no more. As they sing, I wondered why my vision was blurring and my glasses were fogging. I discreetly pressed the 'Record' button on my camera, hoping that one day, in an unidentified future, records of encounters such as this will help in the complex process of the restoration of national memory.

11

INDONESIA'S POSITION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

A BIG BUT DESTITUTE BULLY

During the dry season, the Indonesian forests go up in smoke with frightening regularity, the result of uncontrolled land clearing. The situation is particularly severe in Sumatra, where many forests have been destroyed to make way for palm oil plantations. Enormous clouds of smoke rise above the island, and when the wind blows eastward they cross the Straits of Malacca, covering large parts of the Malaysian Peninsula in sticky and disgusting smog. Kuala Lumpur is affected and so is Singapore. Children have to stay at home – away from school – because the smog is hazardous to their health.

The Indonesian rich, the military and the government have no fear of the outside world. They realize that they can count on almost unconditional support from the West. The rest of the region is aware of that, and keeps obediently quiet.

Several years ago, John Perkins, the author of *Confessions of an Economic Hitman*,[1] told me about his past activities in Indonesia at the New York studio of INN (International News Net). He used 'money, sex and alcohol' to help persuade Indonesian officials and oligarchs to accept large, unnecessary loans that would be impossible to repay. When the scheme succeeded, Indonesia fell under the control of US businesses and the US government. In his latest book, *The Secret History of the American Empire* (2007),[2] Perkins argued that Indonesia is now significantly worse off economically and socially than it was in the 1970s.

But to take on Indonesia would involve taking on the Western interests, particularly those of the United States. Naturally, no government in the region would dare to do it; and it should be remembered that the structure of societies in Thailand and Philippines is essentially feudal, a result of neocolonialism. The wealthy and tiny Singapore and Brunei are too busy getting rich by doing business with the Western multinational companies.

Inspired by the Indonesian terror of 1965 (although mostly not using such extreme genocidal tactics), Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore managed to liquidate their left-wing parties, movements and even entire ideologies, making this large part of Southeast Asia the only area of the world which is completely missing out on the present renaissance of socialism and the renewed struggle for social justice that is apparent from Chile to Venezuela to Athens and New York City.

There is no doubt that Indonesia is once again playing into the hands of Western conservative interests, this time willingly taking the side of the West in its ideological confrontation with China, which intensified with the arrival of Barack Obama's administration.

Obama lived in Indonesia as a child, shortly after the 1965 coup. He was known as 'Barry from Menteng' after the neighbourhood where he grew up. His stepfather Lolo Soetoro was an Indonesian army officer, allegedly involved in the post-1965 purges.

In his report, Wayne Madsen explained:

> In 1967, Obama and his mother joined her husband in Jakarta. In 1965, Lolo Soetoro had been called back from Hawaii by General Suharto to serve as an officer in the Indonesian military to help launch a bloody CIA-backed genocide of Indonesian Communists and Indonesian Chinese throughout the expansive country.[3]

If young Obama was not aware of what was happening as he grew up, he certainly should have better knowledge by now. The signals he is sending to the Indonesian regime are clear (and they include re-establishing cooperation between the United States and the notorious Indonesian special forces, Kopassus): keep to Suharto's course and your crimes, past and present, will not be addressed.

The Indonesian regime does exactly that, and it is being generously rewarded. 'Indonesia has made significant progress in advancing its democratic institutions and practices in a relatively short time,'[4] said Sean McCormack, a State Department spokesperson, in November 2010, explaining the US decision to restore military ties with Indonesia. Yet it would difficult to find any example of this 'progress', unless you count the sheer number of political parties or the fact that periodically the people of Indonesia are asked to insert pieces of paper into a box. In the meantime, the country continues to be ruled by neocons, the military and by ordinary gangsters with better PR.

A REGIONAL VICTIM AND VICTIMIZER

While the Indonesian archipelago had been victimized for centuries by foreign imperialism and business interests, in the last few decades the Indonesian elites have joined hands with their former oppressors, embarking on brutal neocon adventures at home and, whenever they can, abroad as well.

Satya Sivaraman, a left-wing Indian film maker and investigative journalist, got involved in opposing the Indonesian business conglomerate Salim Group, which had been exploiting the recent contradictions of the CPI(M) government in West Bengal, India. He wrote for this book:

> One of the key foreign groups involved in the project to acquire land and build a massive 'chemical hub' was the Salim Group of Indonesia whose founder Liem Sioe Liong (aka Salim) was a close crony of General Suharto, the notorious Indonesian dictator. The Salim Group, through its subsidiary Bright Equity Group Ltd, was part of a consortium called the New Kolkata International Development Pvt. Ltd (NKID) that entered into an agreement with the West Bengal government to develop infrastructure for the proposed chemical hub in Nandigram, which involved acquisition of around 25,000 acres of mostly farm land belonging to poor peasants.
>
> Following the ouster of General Suharto by a popular uprising, the Salim Group lost a lot of its clout, and in recent years has moved investments to other parts of Southeast and South Asia. In Nandigram, however, its plans have been foiled by yet another popular struggle and the Salim Group's investments in West Bengal today face an uncertain future. Several Salim Group companies are known to be fronts for parking funds belonging to the Suharto family.

Indonesian logging companies are accused of corruption, intimidation and environmental destruction in Southeast Asia and in many other countries. The MUSA Group (owned by Suharto's relatives from his village of Kemusu in Yogyakarta), despite protests, obtained logging rights for tens of thousands of hectares in the South American country of Suriname, and began operating there in the 1990s. According to the *Surinaamse Weekkrant,* MUSA gave bribes totalling US$11 million to the leaders of KPTI, a conservative ethnic Javanese party in Suriname.[5]

Prajogo Pangestu, an Indonesian multi-millionaire and timber tycoon, owns several overseas forestry operations, including Rindaya Wood Processing in Malaysia, Lombda Pty Ltd in Papua New Guinea (PNG), and Nantong Plywood in Shanghai. The Malaysian and Indonesian logging companies are known to cause enormous environmental destruction and violate human rights in their own countries as well as abroad, particularly in PNG and the Solomon Islands.

THE REGION IS BENEFITING FROM THE INDONESIAN COLLAPSE

As Indonesia stopped producing, basing its 'economic growth' on plunder of its natural resources, the rest of Southeast Asia has benefited tremendously. For example, since it was unable to satisfy even the basic demand for its main food staple, rice, Indonesia imported 900,000 tonnes of rice from Vietnam between January and September 2011, with additional imports coming from Thailand.[6]

The low productivity and educational standards of Indonesian workers, combined with a badly defined legal system and endemic corruption, have meant that even assembly line manufacturing – one of the backbones of economic growth under Suharto – has been moving to Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam. The television sets for sale in Jakarta are now made in Thailand, computers in Malaysia and China, and production of integrated circuits (microchips) had been moved to Malaysia. Indonesia now imports even automobiles, which were once exclusively manufactured at home for the domestic market, from Thailand and Malaysia.

Indonesia received only 7 million foreign visitors in 2010. In comparison, the much smaller Vietnam received 5 million foreign guests; Thailand with 66 million inhabitants hosted around 18 million, and neighbouring Malaysia with only 28 million inhabitants received 23.3 million foreign visitors in 2009. On a per capita basis, almost all countries in the region, including the Philippines, Singapore, Cambodia and Laos but excluding Burma, attract more visitors than Indonesia. This is because of the appalling state of Indonesian cities (it is hazardous to walk even in tourist centres like Ubud and Yogyakarta), the destroyed infrastructure, notoriously high prices (considering the quality and quantity of the goods and services on offer), the high crime rate, the accent on consumerism and lack of cultural experience offered to visitors. Indonesia is also one of the very few countries where the government has introduced

visa requirements for almost all foreigners, instead of getting rid of them, presumably so it can make a profit from processing them.

The fact that Indonesian airlines are unreliable and hazardous, and most of them are still banned from landing at EU airports, is allowing several regional carriers, particularly Singapore Airlines, to make tremendous profits by connecting Indonesia with the world. In 2011 Singapore Airlines operated eight daily flights between Jakarta and Singapore, all on wide-body Boeing 777s. In comparison, the Indonesian flagship airline Garuda Indonesia used the single-aisle Boeing 737 to operate between the two cities.

The higher than average prices in Indonesia mean that millions of those who can afford it travel abroad for shopping, mainly to Singapore and Malaysia. A collapsed medical system means that the upper and middle classes travel for medical treatment to Malaysia, Singapore or even Thailand. Linda Christanty mentioned that 'I went to Penang in Malaysia for medical treatment. It is not only cheaper than in most hospitals in Jakarta but also they have highly qualified doctors and nurses there, as well as the latest medical equipment.'

Then there are expats and their families, battered by gridlock, pollution and the ugliness and lack of culture in Jakarta. Singapore Airlines flights between Jakarta and Singapore are full of moaning. Despite the propaganda describing Indonesia as a success story, hundreds, and probably thousands, of top executives overseeing business activities in Indonesia have already moved to comfortable quarters in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok, where their families enjoy excellent concerts, exhibitions, and high-quality schools, parks and public transportation. Some executives commute several times a week. The profits from this massive high-end escape from Indonesia go to the pockets of service providers, real estate agencies and airlines in other Southeast Asian countries.

As Indonesia does not have any good libraries, archive or research institutions, most of the local and foreign scholars doing research on the archipelago descend on Singapore. It is also a known fact that the best Indonesian art is exhibited and sold in Singaporean galleries and not in Jakarta or Bali. Indonesian elites and foreigners are forced to travel to Singapore and Kuala Lumpur if they want to attend concerts of classical music or opera (Western, Indian or Chinese), or to enjoy an evening in a theatre or art cinema.

While many decades ago, Malaysian students went to Indonesia to study, the trend is now fully reversed. There is virtually no university in Indonesia that attracts a substantial number of foreign

students, while Malaysia has reinvented itself as the regional educational hub, competing directly with Singapore. Now over 15,000 Indonesian students attend schools in Malaysia.[7]

THE REGION BENEFITS FROM INDONESIAN CORRUPTION

Indonesia is disliked but feared by its neighbours. The fact that this giant on feet of clay is collapsing is common knowledge but it is considered impolite to discuss this, particularly in Malaysia and Singapore. If interviewed, people ask not to be quoted; they only speak off the record. To criticize the 'big brother' is unimaginable. It is also dangerous and might ruin one's career.

Taking into consideration the extensive connections between the Indonesian, Malaysian and Singaporean elites, it is little wonder that the Indonesian nightmare is under-reported in Southeast Asia. There is also complicity in the corruption. For example, on April 28, 2010, AFP reported that Indonesia's deputy attorney general Darmono had complained: 'Singapore is the most strategic country for the corrupt to run away to …. It's geographically the closest to Indonesia and the policy of the Singaporean government enables the corrupt to live there.'[8] The piece continued:

> The report by Indonesia's financial intelligence unit in late 2006 said that around 200 fugitives from Indonesian state debt were residing there …
>
> The suspects include bankers who siphoned off hundreds of millions of dollars in state bailout funds during the 1997–1998 Asian financial crisis, and tycoons of illegal logging, according to official and independent sources.
>
> 'They are living the life there. Their lifestyle in Singapore is above the average,' Indonesia Corruption Watch activist Emerson Yuntho said.
>
> Arif Havas Oegroseno, Director General for Law and International Treaties at the Foreign Ministry, said the proceeds from corruption were more than enough to fund lavish lifestyles in Singapore.
>
> 'As they've invested huge sums of stolen money, which are increasing in value over time, they no longer need to work,' he said.

Franky Espehana, originally an Indonesian but now a Singaporean citizen, and the former senior manager of PT Infokom Elektrindo,

added: 'The sentiment of the Singaporean public is that Indonesians here are rich and easily spend money.'[9]

Indonesia is incomparably poorer than Singapore but it is true that the Indonesian rich are outrageously rich. Most of them never worked for their money: they just oversaw the plunder of resources and corrupted millions, stealing mainly from the poor and from their nation in general. They are good customers because they don't know the value of money. They spend without restraint and they rarely bargain.

May Ling, a Singaporean businesswoman, thinks that allowing the corrupt Indonesian leaders to invest in Singapore is a political decision: 'Imagine … if only they have interest and investment here, they would be less likely to cause damage to our country. It is like letting off steam.'[10]

The majority of the Malaysian and Singaporean intellectuals are extremely chummy either with their own regimes, or with the foreign funding agencies (read: with the political and economical interests of the West, which in turn are eager to preserve the status quo in Indonesia). Southeast Asian intellectuals have never been known for their daring and courage. To attack the Indonesian system, to even acknowledge the social collapse in the big destitute nation next door, would effectively halt their funding. And the projects funded from abroad and related to Indonesia are the biggest and juiciest around.

That explains why so many Malaysian writers, journalists and thinkers fly to Indonesia to attend the handful of officially sponsored 'writers' festivals' and artistic exchanges that are supposed to prove to the world that 'Indonesia is now a normal country' and conceal the political and moral passivity, spinelessness and laziness on both sides. They travel to Jakarta and Bali, hold their noses, scratch each other's backs and massage their consciousness; all expenses paid. They see what they are expected to see and hear what is 'sensible', in exchange for some funding, for a few foreign trips a year and for the main ego-booster – recognition by the Western 'cultural' institutions that are seen as the ultimate judge.

RUN IF YOU CAN, BUT SEND MONEY HOME

I spoke to a maid working in Jakarta, Ms Sukayem, who comes from the Banyumas area in Central Java. She told me:

My daughter is working in Taiwan in a mushroom factory. She

> ran from her previous agent there and now works independently but I think illegally. Every two months she sends us Rp.1.5–2 million [US$170–220] to pay for the credits we took on a motorcycle as well as for her brother's education.[11]

She said that her neighbour's daughter sends home more than US$1,000 a month, something that can hardly come from legitimate work.

Indonesian maids are abused, sexually molested, raped, tortured, even executed, but they leave Indonesia in their millions every year, mostly working in Malaysia and the Middle East. Some come home pregnant, others with scars on their bodies and souls. Others are deported.

According to the official data from the Ministry of Labor and Transmigration, by February 2010 the total number of Indonesian workers abroad was 2,679,536. But as always, statistics in Indonesia are inconsistent. The head of the National Agency for Placement and Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers, Jumhur Hidayat, informed the *Jakarta Post:*

> The agency's data showed that 4.3 million overseas Indonesians worked in the manufacturing, healthcare and hospitality sectors throughout Asia. They also work in households and agriculture. The agency estimated that 1.3 million illegal Indonesia migrant workers also worked in these countries.[12]

The real numbers are definitely even higher. To work abroad is prestigious, it could bring money and it helps break the terrible monotony of life in the Indonesian countryside.

But the price may be too high, especially for women, but also for men. Indonesia was captivated by the latest work by the Bandung-based writer and radio announcer Valiant Budi Yogi, who described his experience as a barista at a coffee chain in Dammam, Saudi Arabia. Both hilarious and shocking, he describes the abuses that Indonesian migrant workers are enduring on a daily basis.

Millions of Indonesians have found their home in Malaysia and Singapore. The story of Mr Hendra, a steward at Four Points by Sheraton Hotel in Kuching, is typical of those who managed to leave Indonesia behind:

> I have been working in Kuching for three years now. I met my wife here, she is Malaysian from Sarawak and I am from

> Pontianak. Now my wife sponsors my stay here. I have to wait another seven years to get Malaysian citizenship. I love it here. In Indonesia, I could not get a comfortable and safe life. Too many conflicts there.[13]

Indonesians are emigrating to all corners of the globe, even to Timor-Leste, which, after the genocide committed by Jakarta, became the poorest country in Asia. Mr Handry, a cashier at Japanese restaurant Wasabie in Dili, did not regret coming there: 'I am from Surabaya. I think there are more than one thousand of us – Indonesians – living in Dili on working visas. Most of us love it here. I think it is because of a higher standard of living and because here we feel safe.'[14] What a paradox, and what kindness from the people of Timor-Leste!

'New Zealand is my home now', confessed Sony Ambudi, a medical doctor originally from Bandung, as he drove me to my hotel after our long conversation. 'I am happy and peaceful here, and so are my family. Things are bad in Indonesia, really bad.'[15]

It is no wonder that Indonesians find it increasingly challenging to stay at home. 'The country's performance in eradicating poverty was even worse than Southeast Asian neighbours Cambodia and Laos, each of which, during the same period, managed to lower the number of their poor', said Setyo Budiantoro, executive director of the Center for Welfare Studies (Prakarsa). 'In Southeast Asia, Indonesia is the only country in which poverty is on the rise. Compare that to Laos and Cambodia, which have few natural resources and bad government. This shows that the government has failed in its battle against poverty.'[16]

COMPARING APPLES AND ROTTEN APPLES

'I don't like Malaysia', Sukarno used to say. 'Sabah and Sarawak should be part of Indonesia. Indonesia should be big and powerful just like in the old days of the Majapahit Empire. I will fight against Malaysia.' That was called *Konfrontasi*. Sukarno used to fire up the crowd in the early 1960s, with speeches along these lines:

> If we are hungry, that's normal.
> If we are ashamed, that's normal too.
> But if we are hungry or ashamed because of Malaysia, that's atrocious!
> Let's send troops to Kalimantan to beat up those Malayan cockroaches!

Photo 11.1 Indonesian soldiers in training, at Tanjung Pasir, west of Jakarta

> Strike and finish them, do not let our land and air be trampled by those rogue Malaysians!

But all the villages in Sabah and Sarawak have access to electricity, while many of those on the other side of the border have not. The city of Miri is famous for its music festivals, and Kuching may be one of the most liveable places in Southeast Asia. Hundreds of thousands of Indonesians from the southern part of Borneo (Kalimantan) are crossing the border; looking for jobs, a better life and medical care.

The contrast between Indonesian and Malaysian cities and villages is shocking. Professor Isna Wijayani compared her home city of Palembang in Sumatra with Kuching in Malaysian Sarawak:

> There are some similarities, like their size. Both cities have big rivers passing through the centre. But the two cities are also strikingly different. Kuching is a very clean city with so many attractions; it is very orderly and rich. Palembang is dirty. The Musi River is filthy and there are no pedestrian walkways on its riverbanks. There is not much to do there.[17]

It is hard to believe that the Malaysian cities of Kuching and

Georgetown are on the same continent as Palembang, Pontianak and Medan. While on the Malaysian side, heritage walks, ethnic eateries, dozens of museums, enormous public libraries and social housing are the norm, the Indonesian cities have open sewage, the most appalling misery, an acute lack of public spaces and the open ugliness that usually accompanies a lack of planning and corruption. There is no place on Earth where a one-hour flight could connect two cities with more different standards of living than Singapore and Jakarta.

When prominent left-wing Israeli journalist and author Amira Hass, recognized for her reporting on Palestinian affairs in the West Bank and Gaza (where she has also lived for a number of years), visited my place in East Jakarta, she lasted only two days before the city overwhelmed her. Before departing for Bandung she said, 'This place seems to be more desperate than Gaza.' I had to agree. I covered the last intifada in Gaza, and despite the tragedy of the situation, I did not feel as shattered and depressed there as I usually feel in the Indonesian capital. But just to make sure I was not out of my mind, I checked the UNDP Human Development Index. It confirmed that the Palestinian territories ranked 97, while Indonesia ranked 111. That is even on the basis of the official (manipulated) data that the Indonesian state feeds the UN agencies.

That is when I decided to write this book. The story had to be told.

12

CONCLUSION

For 15 years, I have attempted to document the epic proportions of the Indonesian disaster. I have travelled by plane, by long-distance Pelni ships, by dingy ferries and tiny private boats; I drove and I took buses, trains and trucks. And I walked whenever I could. Wanting to see it all, I moved from Aceh to Alor, from Papua to the Moluccas and Batam. In 1998 I was at Trisakti University, sleeping under a table with the students trying to push Suharto out of power. I covered massacres, riots and pogroms in Solo, Ambon, the occupied East Timor, Aceh and Glodok.

From my first hours in Indonesia (I landed in Medan), I sensed that this was a collapsed, dysfunctional country. I did not know why but I was determined to find out. The reports that I read were contradictory; the numbers did not add up. The propaganda that was glorifying Indonesia made no sense.

I got seriously involved in Indonesia while I was still living in Santiago de Chile. And I am writing these final words of the book while editing a documentary film on Rwanda and the plunder of an enormously rich (in natural resources) but tragic country – Congo/DRC. For several years I have been living and working in East Africa. All three places are interconnected. The merciless commercial interests and cruel geopolitical ambitions of the West have brought unimaginable horrors to the people of Indonesia, Chile and the Congo. The story in all these places is about natural resources, but also about power.

My ambition was, and still is, to connect the dots, to describe how neocolonialism operates in the places that I know intimately, in Latin America, Africa, Oceania and Southeast Asia.

The new concept of coups planned and introduced from outside, followed by the mass slaughter of people and a quick introduction of neocon 'free market' regimes, was first tested in Jakarta in 1965 and later implemented all over the world, particularly in Chile and in Africa. The results were most cruel – tens of millions of people were thrown into misery. Only a decisive rejection of the fascist 'heritage', as happened in Chile, can reverse the destructive trend and return the nation to its original state.

In Indonesia, the killing spree, the propaganda and indoctrination were the most complete and, from the point of view of the neocon forces of the West, the most 'successful'. To find out what really happened in Indonesia was not easy, as one of the by-products of the Indonesian market-fundamentalist 'success' has been a thorough disappearance of intellectualism, a terrible level of education and a chronic lack of appetite for serious thought.

Still, I began working. I have had appointments and meetings cancelled; people have arrived late or not showed up at all. The power game seemed more important to many than the results. Even the tiny bits of zeal I uncovered disappeared once it became clear that I was not in a position to disburse any funds. To make officials, organizations and individuals cooperate has required a Herculean effort. My work was often depressing and tiresome. But little by little, the big picture began to emerge. After producing a 90-minute film about the 1965 coup and after co-writing what became Pramoedya Ananta Toer's last book with him and Rossie Indira, I managed to surround myself with a small group of people I could count on.

I continued to face suspicion and fear, open hostility and outbursts of wounded nationalist pride. I found victims denying their victimhood while perpetrators felt no remorse. Many of the Indonesian poor and others who had suffered from the regime seemed to be suffering from 'Stockholm syndrome'. Indonesia was up there with parts of Africa as the most difficult and unwelcoming places I have ever worked. '*Nggak tau*' (I don't know) was the most common phrase I heard, rivalled only by '*Nggak ingat*' (I don't remember).

The archives were pathetic and libraries either nonexistent or thoroughly insufficient. I found that almost everything related to Indonesia that was taken for granted by the international community was untrue – even data about the number of people inhabiting the archipelago – but to contradict the official Western and Indonesian version, when there was hardly any data available, required a huge effort. The quality of journalism in Indonesia is still so low that sometimes in a single article I encountered up to three numbers contradicting each other, making it tremendously difficult to find trusted citations.

It often felt as if nobody wanted this story to be told. Everything required enormous patience. I had to undertake long journeys. I did not seek any funding for writing this book; I lived on income from other work. I felt that if I received funding it would influence my angle, and I wanted to be totally free in describing what I saw. To

Photo 12.1 Poor, uneducated but full of self-esteem and spite: a child from one of the slums of Jakarta

work with no institutional support is exciting and satisfying, but financially and psychologically draining: one is truly on one's own.

But little by little, an image began to emerge. It was an image of a country in ruins, where the great majority of the people lived without sanitation or clean water, and between 35 and 40 per cent were without electricity. It was of a country with at least 50 million unregistered children. I saw a confused and inward-looking country, robbed, devastated and in chronic pain. A country immobilized by fear, a country without memory, without leaders and heroes, without role models and without hope.

Right from the beginning there were two main reasons why I wanted to write this book. I aimed at warning the world about what could happen to a poor nation forced to live the fascist nightmare accompanied by an unrestrained capitalist system. The other reason was emotional: I felt great sadness observing tens of millions of people going through their lives with almost no aspirations or higher dreams. I felt sadness in observing a once beautiful archipelago now reduced to logged-out and mined-out islands, covered by chemical spills, dirt-poor villages and monstrous, unliveable cities.

I knew that only those who were following their personal interests could see Indonesia as a success story. Those who have been living in misery – the majority of the nation – would not see their country as a success or failure; they were not trained to think in these terms. To them, it has been always '*biasa*' – the usual thing. They do not even imagine that things could improve in their lifetime, and they don't know what to dream of.

Thinking about Indonesia, my mind often wanders to the Komodo dragon, a giant reptile that is found in the East. Despite its deplorable carnivorous habits, the creature is actually very poor. Its habitat has been devastated. And all around Indonesia too, everything has been stolen and ruined. Corruption has propelled land grabs across the area. There was even one instance when many villagers were forced to leave an area after it was designated a World Heritage site. Corrupt business people and officials saw that as a commercial opportunity.

The Komodo dragon had to change its migratory patterns, swimming farther than it could safely manage, or it would drown or run out of food. It was converted into a sort of commercial attraction, and people were expected to pay a lot to travel to see it, but they soon found out that they saw mostly the devastation around it. It lies on the ground, charging its batteries from the sun during the day, its mouth open. Not much falls into it, but usually enough to survive. It appears that most of the time it is just waiting for something to happen.

Where it used to roam freely, pollution is on the increase. Its natural habitat is ruined. Periodically, the Komodo dragon snaps at park rangers, but its moves are calculated in advance; they are predictable. Its infrequent and wobbly sparks of resistance present no danger to the system.

After closer examination and with some dose of imagination, one could conclude that the creature is scared.

Hoi An, Central Vietnam
February 29, 2012

West propaganda machine targets Russia: Journalist

NOTES

FOREWORD

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for economics and industry and chairman of BAPPENAS, 1973–83), Ali Wardhana (PhD in economics, University of California, Berkeley, 1962; minister of finance, 1968–83; coordinating minister for economics, industry and supervision of development, 1983–88), Mohammad Sadli (ME, MIT, 1956; study at the University of California, Berkeley, 1956–57; PhD in economics, University of Indonesia, 1957; minister of manpower, 1971–73; minister of mining, 1973–78), Emil Salim (PhD in economics, University of California, Berkeley, 1964; vice-chairman of BAPPENAS, 1969–73; minister of state for the improvement of the state apparatus, 1971–73; minister of communication, 1973–78; minister of state for development supervision and the environment, 1978–83; minister of state for population and the environment, 1983–93) and Subroto (MA in Economics, McGill University, Montreal, 1956; director general of marketing, Department of Trade, 1968–71; minister of transmigration and cooperatives, 1971–73; minister of manpower, transmigration and cooperatives, 1973–78; minister of mining and energy, 1978–88).

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POR LULA
Contra el Imperio
OKYANUSYA
Terrorismo occidental
Chomsky
Indonesia: ayer y hoy
INDONESIEN

INDEX

A
Abacha, Sani, 142
Abdullah, Saleh, 119–20
Aceh Women's League (LINA), 131
Act of Free Choice, 121
Adam, Asvi Warman, 25, 32
Adam Air, 173
ADB *see* Asian Development Bank
Affandi, 216
Affidick, Deddy, 165
AFP (Agence France Presse), 88–9, 104, 107, 121, 159, 167, 224
Age, The, 95, 98
Ahmad, Syahrudin, 89
Ahmadiyah, 189, 192–5, 197, 205
AHRC *see* Asian Human Rights Commission
Aidit, Dipa Nusantara, 34
Aidit, Ilham, 26, 34
Al Jazeera, 59
Alkatiri, Mari, 127
Allende, Salvador, 28
Amar, Boy Rafli, 191
Ambon, 136
Ambudi, Sony, 179, 227
Amnesty International, 103–4
Anderson, Benedict, 5, 28, 38, 89, 206
Angkatan Bersenjata, 29
Anwar, Desi, 92–3
'Arab Spring', 10
Arara Abadi Corporation, 97
Arastamar Evangelical School of Theology (SETIA), 187–8
Ariane, Zely, 75, 83, 110
Armed Forces, Special, 31
Army, Royal Netherlands East Indies, 19
Arun, PT, 131
As'at, Said Ali, 191
Asagaf, Yahya, 191
ASEAN, 141, 175, 210
Asia–Africa Conference, 23
Asia Foundation, 41
Asia Pulp and Paper, 170
Asia Times, 193, 206
Asian crisis, 38
Asian Development Bank, 168
Asian financial crisis, 47, 61, 224
Asian Human Rights Commission, 84, 102, 110–11, 193–4
'Asian Tigers', 47
Asraw, 165
Assegaf, Mohammad, 98
Assembly, People's Consultative (MPR), 8, 38
asset recovery, 139
  Stolen Asset Recovery Initiative, 142
Association for the Prevention of Torture, 101
Atambua, 75
Ataturk, 87
atheism/atheists 6, 10, 25, 112, 134, 141, 184, 186, 189
Australian National University (ANU), 41
Ayam, 120
Azhar, Haris, 99–100, 111, 126, 132

Azziyadah, Madrasah, 187, 208

B
Backman, Michael, 95, 98
Badau, 134
Baki, Sir Peter, 108
Bakrie, 52, 145
Bakrie, Aburizal, 144–5
Bali, 30–1, 60–4, 75, 79, 84, 96, 99, 110–11, 167, 172, 180, 216, 223, 225
Balibo, 76, 88
Balibo Five, 88
Banda Aceh, 129–31, 164–6, 198, 215
Bandung, 1, 23, 52, 73, 77, 91, 105, 149–50, 154, 160, 174, 177–8, 180, 212–13, 226–7, 229
Bandung Conference *see* Asia–African Conference
Bandung Institute of Technology, 68, 77, 207
Bangka island, 156–7
Banyuwangi, 35–6, 186, 205
Bapak Pembangunan (Father of Development), 38
Bapak Pembangkrutan (Father of Bankruptcy), 39
barong, 61, 64
Battalion 744 Dili, 75
BBC, 102, 124
Beatty, Andrew, 2, 34, 36, 80, 200, 204
Beauvoir, Simone de, 16
Bechtel, 48
Belawan, *Kampung*, 163
Berita Yudha, 29
Beijing, 69, 178, 203
Bell, Allan, 139–42
Belo, Bishop, 125
Benning, Fort, 8, 74
Berkeley Mafia, the, 26, 44–5, 47–8, 172
Berkeley, University of California at, 26, 44
Besuki village, 144
Bhakti Suci, 115
bin Mahdani, Idris, 194
bin Misra, Dani, 194
Bintuni Bay, 118
BKPM *see* Investment Coordinating Board
Blanco, Don Antonio, 61, 216
Bohorok Orang-utan Rehabilitation Center, 161
Borneo *see* Kalimantan
Bowo, Fauzi, 76–7
Boyolali, 31
Brantas river, 30
Brazil, 7, 41, 49–50, 53, 94
BRIC, 49–50
BRIIC, 50
British slaughter, 73
broker anggaran see budget arbitrator
Bright Equity Group Ltd, 221
budget arbitrator, 150
Budiantoro, Setyo, 227
Buenos Aires, 69, 203
Bumi Resources, PT, 145
Burchett, George, 6, 65, 216
Burchett, Wilfred, 6, 65
Buru, concentration camp, 22, 46, 73–4, 184
Buru Quartet, 202

C
Caltex, 43
Cambridge University, 34
Canadian Westcoast Energy, 48
Canberra, 7, 9, 25, 41, 123
Cape Town, 65, 69, 203
capital slum of Indonesia, 72
capitalism, 12, 16, 25, 59, 83, 148, 175, 184
  anti-capitalism, 31
  extreme, 40
  fundamentalist, 42
  unbridled, 65
Castle, James, 50–1
Catholics, Roman, 10, 187, 196

Cendana Group, 48
Center for East Asia Cooperation Studies (CEACoS), 159
Center for History and Political Ethics (PUSDEP), 18, 37, 199
Center for Welfare Studies (Prakarsa), 227
Century, Bank, 148
'Centurygate', 148
Chicago Boys, Los, 26, 44
Chile, 26, 28, 44–5, 65, 139, 220, 230
China, 7, 11, 13, 16, 25, 27, 33, 49–50, 52, 66, 94, 113, 115–16, 146, 151, 172, 175, 178, 181–2, 206, 209–10, 213, 215, 220, 222
China Daily Asia Weekly, 115
Chinese
  anti-Chinese genocide, 113
  language, 11, 115–16
  minority, 2, 10, 112–13
Chomsky, Noam, 123
Christanty, Linda, 11, 93, 215–16, 223
Christian Science Monitor, 60
Chung Yuan ceremony, 115
CIA, 24, 29, 32–4, 37
  -backed genocide, 220
  -backed mujahideen units, 184
  documents, 37
  Intelligence Memorandum, 183
Cikeusik, 91, 192–4
circumcision, female, 104
Citarum, 155
Clinton, Hillary Rodham, 9, 84–6, 126, 190
Coen, Jan Pieterszoon, 17
colonialism, 16–7, 23–5, 73
  anti-colonialism, 31
  neocolonialism, 23, 219, 230
commissions, 127
  CAVR (Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation), 85, 107
  Electoral Commission, 12
  Communion of Churches in Indonesia, 198
communism, 6, 46, 67, 184
  'war against communism', 186
communist(s), 2, 10–2, 18, 23–5, 29, 31–2, 86, 123, 134, 146, 148, 183–5, 220
  anti-communism, 4, 10, 32–3
  coup, propaganda about the, 142
  movements, 18
  Party of Chile, 44
  Party of Indonesia, 11, 21, 25–7, 29, 75, 184
Confessions of an Economic Hitman, 219
Confucianism, 10
Consultancy, Political & Economic Risk, 147
Coomaraswamy, Radhika, 106
Corby, Schapelle, 99
corruption, 3, 8, 13, 15, 21, 27, 42, 51–2, 59, 77, 89, 95–6, 136,138–53, 158, 165–6, 169, 179, 198, 206, 211, 218, 221, 224, 229, 233
  anti-corruption, 85, 101, 139
  endemic, 8, 161, 222
  eradication, 138
  Indonesia Corruption Watch, 224
Corruption Eradication Commission, 139
Corruption Perception Index, 146
Council of Ulemas (MUI), 192
coup, 22–3, 25–6, 28–9, 31–3, 37–8, 44–5, 57, 73, 89, 138, 142, 148, 202, 216, 230
  of 1965, 24, 28, 32, 202, 206, 220, 231
  military, 2, 10–11, 29, 140
  US-sponsored Chilean, 44
court(s), 24, 29, 89, 92, 95, 97, 99, 144–5, 149–50, 194–6, 204
  Central Jakarta District, 98
  Constitutional, 90

East Timor, 77
Langsa District, 108
out-of-court settlement, 143
Supreme, 99, 143, 189
US Appeals, 132
crimes against humanity, 3, 30, 77, 84

D
Dahlan, Muhidin M., 89
Daily Telegraph, 3
Dali, Salvador, 61
Dalih Pembunuhan Massal Gerakan 30 September dan Kudeta Soeharto (Pretext for Mass Murder: The September 30 Movement and Suharto's Coup), 89
Daradjatun, Adang, 77
Darah Merah Integrasi *see* Red Blood for Integration
Darmawan, 89
Darmono, 224
Davies, Richard, 144
deforestation, 132, 153–5, 157, 160–1, 169
democracy, 8–10, 18, 21, 41, 73, 80–3, 90, 96, 146
criminal, 96
guided, 20
of generals, 74
striving, 66
without law, 96
democratic, 9, 11, 17, 21, 37, 39, 46, 78, 81–4, 90, 96, 107, 121, 220
Democratic Party, 149
Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle, 176
Democratic Struggle and the Fight for Socialism, The, 75, 83
dictatorship, 9, 12, 16, 20, 28–9, 36, 38, 49, 86, 89, 164
Dili, 65, 75, 78, 125, 127, 227
disappearance of intellectualism, 231
disappearances, 2, 86
discrimination, 101, 104, 112
racial, 112–13
religious, 88, 189
Ditasari, 189
Djarum, 52
Djayusman, Nugroho, 191
Djokopekik, 202, 216–17
'domino effect', 11, 123
Dorling, Philip, 78
Dos Santos, Sisto, 127
DPR *see* House of Representatives
DPRD see House of Regional Representatives
Dress-Gross, 60
Dulles, John Foster, 24
Durham University, 144

E
East Indies, 17, 46
Dutch East Indies, 17
Royal Netherlands East Indies Army, 19
East Timor *see* Timor Leste
economic(s), 13, 40, 42–5, 47–50, 53, 59, 81, 86, 140, 148, 168, 190, 209
blueprint, 44
dogma, 142
'elites', 8, 11, 25
growth, 43, 49, 53–6, 59, 139, 222
indicators, 53, 56
interests, 3, 8, 24, 56, 85, 183
regimes, 140
system, 60, 96, 152
socio-economic system, 154
teams, 44
Economist, 48, 50, 58, 77
economists, 26, 40, 44–6, 54
right-wing, 28
military-educated, 37
Egypt, 24
Eisenhower, Dwight D. 24
elections, 26, 75, 77–81, 90, 121, 135, 209, 215

democratic, 81
direct, 83
gubernatorial, 77, 80
multi-party, 79
presidential, 12, 77, 80
Electronic Information and Transactions Law, 88
Elektrindo, Infokom PT., 49, 179, 224
elites, 8, 11, 14, 18, 20, 25–8, 49, 56, 59, 62, 69–70, 81, 83–4, 86, 88, 93–5, 98, 119, 137–8, 141–2, 148, 152, 178, 182, 185, 205, 213, 216, 221, 223–4
'elite nationalists', 20
Eluay, Theys, 122
Embraer, 50
Enam Jalan Menuju Tuhan (Six Roads to God), 89
Enlai, Zhou, 24
environment, 11, 21, 82, 86, 139, 152–3, 156, 159, 160, 161, 163, 166–7, 168, 221–2
Indonesian forum for the Environment, 167
Eridani, Aditiana Dewi, 104
Ermera, 106, 125
Espehana, Franky, 224
ETAN (East Timor and Indonesia Action Network), 84–5, 126–7
exile, 16, 31, 138, 202, 207
extra-judicial killing, 34, 78, 99
Exxon Mobil, 131–2, 165

F

Fadly, Hendra, 131
Farid, Hilmar, 17–20, 26, 29, 74
Fauzi, Muhammad, 18
Feisal, Arahmaiani, 213–15
FGM *see* genital mutilation
FGM/C *see* genital mutilation
Financial Times, 175, 209
Fitna (or *Fitnah*), 88
Forbes, 52, 144
Forces, Allied, 19,
Ford, Gerald, 124, 126
Ford Foundation, 26, 44, 138
International Training and Research Program, 45
funded students, 45
Forum of United Muslims, 195–6
Forum Umat Islam Bersatu see Forum of United Muslims
Four Points by Sheraton Hotel, 226
FPI *see* Islamic Defenders Front
Free Aceh Movement, 128–31
Freeport (Freeport Indonesia, PT/ Freeport-McMoran Copper & Gold Inc./Freeport-McMoran) 40, 54–5, 111, 119, 122
Fretilin, 76, 123
Frey, Regina, 161–2
Friedman, Milton, 43, 45, 140
fundamentalism, 190
capitalist, 13, 42
Islamic, 200
market, 14, 26, 47, 60, 161, 172, 231
religious, 108, 193

G

G20 50, 59
leaders' summit, 78
Gaddafi, Muammar, 141
Gadjah Mada University, 96
Galeano, Eduardo, 56
GAM (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*) *see* Free Aceh Movement
Garuda (Indonesia Airlines), 56, 101, 174, 223
genital mutilation, 9, 103, 104–5
genocide, 2, 7, 29–30, 73, 91, 109, 111, 113, 116, 119, 120, 125, 127, 220, 227
of 1965, 26, 42, 56, 209
anti-Chinese, 113
in East Timor, 77, 142
'Indonesia's slow motion genocide', 122
in Papua, 84, 116–17
Gerwani, 24, 29, 105–6, 183
Ginting, 163

Ginting, Paulus Surya, 116–17
Giribangun, 141
Gisenii, 53
Gleno, 107
Global Research, 32
GlobeAsia magazine, 145
Golkar, 81, 164
Grand Indonesia, 211
Greene, Graham, 65
Greenpeace, 51, 55, 118, 132, 154–5, 169–70
Griffiths, Jay, 122
Guerin, Bill, 206
Guest, Donna, 103
Gulowsen, Truls, 169
Gumelar, Adrianus, 216
Gunung Leuser National Park, 161–2
Gus Dur *see* Wahid, Abdurrahman
Gusmao, Xanana, 123, 125, 127

H
Hadibroto, Yasir, 34
HAK Association (Law, Basic Rights, Justice), 127
HANURA, 77
Hapsoro, 155
Hardjapamekas, Erry Riyana, 139, 146
Harjojudanto, Sigit, 48
Hartono, Taufiq, 195
Hass, Amira, 229
Hau'ofa, Epeli, 140
Helsinki peace agreement, 130–1
Hendardi, 8, 93, 96, 100, 149–50
Hendropriyono, AM Lt. Gen. (ret.), 76
Hidayat, Jumhur, 226
Himawan, Anton, 70
Hindu, 10, 63–4, 141
Hinduized mystics, 200
Hiroshima, 164
Hitler, Adolf, 32, 68
Hong Kong, 84, 139, 147, 174, 178, 193, 206
Horta, Ramos, 127
hospitals, 3, 13, 103, 105, 138, 156, 179–81, 186, 223
  Cipto Mangunkusumo, 71
  Dr Suyoto, 180
  Harapan Kita, 180
  Pertamina, 143
House of Regional Representatives, 151
House of Representatives, 8, 100, 105, 151, 176, 186, 190
'Houston concept', 72
How Did the Generals Die?, 89
Howard, John, 45
Huffington Post, 198
human rights, 59, 73, 84–5, 99–101, 103–5, 107, 111–12, 116, 122, 126–7, 189–90, 222
  abuses, 117, 122, 127–8
  Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), 84, 194
  crimes, 126
  UN Human Rights Commission, 106
  UNHCR National Commission on Human Rights, 107
  violations, 77–8, 84–5, 89, 100, 102, 112, 127, 139, 191
  violators, 126
Human Rights Watch, 198
Hussein, Saddam, 141

I
Ibrahim, Maulana, 164
illegal loggers, 157, 159
illegal logging, 95, 146, 153, 158–9, 162, 166, 224
imperialism, 25, 184
  anti-imperialism, 31
  foreign, 221
impunity, 85, 98, 116, 127, 138–9
  'culture of', 102, 146
  of the armed forces, 85, 161
independence, 10, 13, 17, 19–20, 24, 27, 32, 59, 77, 100–1, 103,

107, 110–11, 114, 117–18, 120, 122, 125, 128, 130–1, 134, 137
pro, 78, 111, 116, 125
pro-Papuan, 146
Proclamation of, 20
struggle for, 27, 73, 216
Index
Corruption Perception, 146
Logistic Performance, 51
UNDP Human Development, 229
India, 7, 13, 16–17, 21, 41, 48–50, 73, 152, 182, 206, 209–10, 221
Indira, Rossie, 6, 231
Indo Barometer survey, 83
Indochina, 11, 23
communist movements in, 11
Indonesia
language (Bahasa Indonesia), 7, 19, 202
University of Indonesia, 26, 44–5, 138, 159
Indonesia Civil Aviation Institute, 174
Indonesia Matters, 148
Indonesian Communist Party *see* Communist Party of Indonesia
Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle, 176
Indonesian Mujaheedin Council, 164
Indonesian National Armed Forces 77, 106, 111, 119–20, 131–2
Indrayani, Dr, 180
infrastructure, 13, 23, 47, 51, 56, 127, 139, 146, 159, 166, 172, 177, 221–2
collapsed, 5, 171
medical, 180
primitive, 153
telecommunications, 179
Institute for Democracy and Peace, 8, 87
Institute of Netherlands History, 117
intelligence, 101, 120–1, 224
CIA Intelligence Memorandum, 183
New Intelligence Bill, 114
interests, 8, 22, 25, 27, 32, 79, 93, 97, 138, 169, 190, 195, 199, 230, 233
American oil, 24
business, 22, 43, 84, 100, 131, 138, 175, 221
conflict of, 190
economic, 3, 8, 24, 56, 85, 183, 225
financial, 26, 95
foreign, 15, 74
geopolitical, 22
ideological, 183
of the people, 15, 100
political, 8, 79, 95–6, 183, 225
religious, 95
US, 86
Western, 44, 182–4, 219
Western conservative, 220
International Business Chamber, 50
International Lawyers for West Papua, 117
International Monetary Fund (IMF), 23, 43, 47–9, 61, 96
capo of, 39
Intramuros, 68
Investment Coordinating Board, 42
Iraq, 44, 154, 186
IRIN, 105
Iskan, Dahlan, 175
Islam/Islamic, 6, 9, 25, 35, 63, 86, 87–8, 90, 119, 182–5, 190, 195, 197–200, 204
anti-Islamism, 190
cadres, 183
clerics, 183
extremism, 182
fundamentalists, 200
groups, 12, 25, 192
Islamists, 10, 22, 189–91
Islamization, 2, 198
leaders, 104
Liberal Islam, 192

organizations, 186
pan-Islamic movement, 18
political Islam, 10
political party, 190
radical Islamists, 92, 191
suicide bomber, 113
see also Muslim(s), Muslim sects
Islam and Women's Rights Information Centre, 104
Islamic Boarding School, 197
Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), 85, 164, 186, 188–92, 205
Islamic Ummah Forum, 186
Islamic University (IAIN) Ar-Raniry, 198
Ismail, Noor Huda, 10, 182, 199
ISSI (Institute of Social History of Indonesia), 18
Iwan Fals, 211

J
Jakarta Globe, 91, 117, 155, 159, 186, 194
'Jakarta is coming', 28, 44, 65
Jakarta Military Command, 76
Jakarta Post, 42, 57, 59, 76–7, 101, 176–7, 189, 192, 197, 210, 226
Jakarta Statistics Agency, 174
Japanese Imperial Army, 19, 27, 124
Japanese occupation, 19
Javanese culture, 202–4
Javanese feudalism, 13
Javanese philosophy, 204
Javanism, 204, 214
JIFFEST (Jakarta International Film Festival), 70
Jihad/Jihadis, 112, 188
cadres, 184, 199
journalism, 91, 95, 157, 231
crab journalism, 94
Indonesian Journalists Association, 93
Judicial Mafia Eradication Task Force, 96
Junaedy, Rachmat, 131, 167
Junta, 46
military, 139
Juoro, Umar, 56
Jusuf, Ester, 112–3
JW Marriott Hotel, 199–200

K
Kadane, Kathy, 34
Kalimantan, 79, 81, 100, 115, 132–7, 159, 167–8, 175, 227–8
'Kap Gestapu', 37
Katjasungkana, Nursyahbani, 100, 103, 105, 190
Kebo Ijo, 31
Ken Arok, 31
Kennedy, John F., 117
Kepong, LN PT., 163
ketoprak, 11, 203
Keynes, John Maynard, 40, 45
killings
of Chinese, 91
extrajudicial, 78, 99, 118
mass, 27, 32, 109
mob, 205
political, 100
religious, 198
see also genocide, murder
King, Peter, 120–1, 146
Kissinger, Henry, 124, 126
Klein, Naomi, 32–3, 42, 44, 184
Kobe University, 46
Komodo dragon, 233
Kompas, 94
Komunitas Utan Kayu, 82
Konfrontasi, 227
Konser Rakyat, 211
Kontras, 99, 111, 126, 131–2
Kopassus, 74, 78, 84, 112, 120, 122–3, 220
Koran, 6, 197
KPK *see* Corruption Eradication Commission
Kristiyanto, Nisan, 218
Kuala Lumpur, 69, 213, 219, 223
Kuching, 68, 226, 228
Kupang, 75
Kusumawijaya, Marco, 113

L
Lafarge Cement Indonesia, 166
Laksono, Agung, 6
Lampung, 34, 105
landowners, 25, 183
Langsa District Court, 108
Lapindo/Lapindo Brantas, 144–5
Latifundistas, 12
law(s)
  anti-pornography, 90
  Electronic Information and Transactions, 88
  Indonesian Criminal Procedural, 102
  Leahy Law, 122
  martial, 129, 165
  sharia, 10, 90
  Shariah Public Decency, 109
Lawu, Mount, 4–5, 7
Leahy Law, 122
Lekra *see* People's Cultural Institute, 75
Lekra Tak Membakar Buku: Suara Senyap Lembar Kebudayaan Harian Rakjat 1950–1965 (Lekra Did Not Burn Books: The silent voice of the cultural pages of the *People's Daily* 1950–1965), 89
Leksana, Grace, 30, 86
Le Monde Diplomatique, 123
Leo Kristi, 211
Lestari, 24
Leuser Eco System *see* Gunung Leuser National Park
Lhoong, 132, 167
Lhoong Setia Mining, PT, 166–7
Liem Sioe Liong, 221
Ling, May, 225
logging
  illegal, 95, 146, 153, 158–9, 162, 166, 224
  unbridled, 14
Lombda Pty Ltd, 222
Lotus Operation, 76
Lubang Buaya, 4, 27–8
Lubis, Todung Mulya, 59
Lyonnaise des Eaux, 48–9
M
Maarif, 166
MacIntyre, Andrew, 41
madrasa(s), 182, 185, 208
Madsen, Wayne, 183, 220
Maitar, Bustar, 51–2, 55, 118–19, 132, 155, 169
Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI) *see* Indonesian Mujaheedin Council
Maksoem, Dadang M., 178
Malacca, straits of, 3, 11
Malaysia, 3, 11–13, 47, 51–3, 64, 133–4, 141, 146, 153, 159, 163, 167–8, 172, 175, 179, 206–7, 210–11, 219–20, 222–9
Malik, Adam, 121
Mandala, 174
Mandarin language, 113
Mangkunegaran dynasty, 5
Manila, 65, 68
Manokwari, 121
Maquiladoras, 54
Marcos, Ferdinand, 142
Marhaban, Shadia, 131
Marriott, JW Hotel, 199–200
Marshall Plan, 20
Martens, Robert J., 34
martial law, 129, 165
Martins, Francisco, 107
martyrs, 38
Marx, Karl, 45
Marxist(s), 56, 184, 189
Maryanto, 217–8
Maubere, 124
mausoleum, 5–7, 141
McCormack, Sean, 220
McGehee, Ralph, 32
McNeill, David, 144
Medan, 69, 162–4, 173, 178, 229–30
Medco, 52, 111
media
  Australian, 106

Chinese, 141
foreign, 142, 172
Indonesian, 91, 93–5, 127, 154, 187
mass, 29, 38, 66, 69, 100, 141, 154, 190
silence of, 159
Western, 9–10, 49, 67, 78, 87, 111, 125, 141, 182
see also press
Media Indonesia, 94
Megawati, 81, 111, 148, 209
Mengungkap Misteri Keberagaman Agama (Explaining the Mysteries of Religious Diversity), 89
Mentawai island, 152
Merapi, Mt., 152
Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate, 118
Merpati, 173
Metro TV, 94
Mexico, 41
Mexico City, 12
middle class, 47, 57, 59, 70–1, 149, 223
Indonesian, 71
international standards, 70
lower, 46, 180
upper, 57–8, 70, 142
Middle East, 10, 90, 124, 226
Military Operation Zone, 122
militias, 112, 205
pro-Jakarta, 125
Millennium Development Goals, 210
Miller, John M., 84
minority
Chinese, 2, 10, 112–3
ethnic, 3
mob
attack, 194
justice, 88, 193, 196
killing, 193, 205
racist, 69
rule, 92, 194
moderate
and tolerant, 182, 190, 199
form of Islam, 87
Mohamad, Gunawan, 82, 215
Mon décor, Galeri, 218
Monas *see* National Monument
Monde Diplomatique, Le, 123
Morning Star flag, 121
Mosque, Syekh Muhammad Kholil, 197
Mount Lawu, 4–5, 7
movement(s)
communist, 11, 18, 23
for Papua solidarity, 110
Free Aceh, 128
Free Papua, 118–20
Fretilin, 123
Gerwani, 106
independence, 13, 111
Islamist, 10
New Life, 23
non-aligned, 23, 44
pan-Islamic, 18
Papuan, 117
progressive, 23, 83
pro-people, 86
reformasi, 83
religious, 164
separatist, 122
September 30th Movement, 28, 32–3
Moynihan, Daniel, 125
MPR *see* People's Consultative Assembly
Muchidin, 79
'mud flood', 154
Muhajir, 132, 167
Muhlis, 134
Mulyani, Sri, 54
Munawar, Said Agil, 149
Mungkasa, Oswar, 155
Munir, 85, 101
Munir, Suciwati, 101
murder
execution-style, 99
extrajudicial, 86
mass, 15, 33, 77, 122

see also genocide, killings
Murray, Scott, 53–4, 60
Mursitama, Tirta N., 159
MUSA Group, 221
Musi river, 157, 160, 228
Muslim(s), 10, 105, 148, 182
cadres, 30, 42, 184
provocateurs, 195
Shia, 192, 197
see also Islam
Muslim sect(s), 10, 92, 192
racial, 3
religious, 3, 10
religious institutions, 85
MUI *see* Council of Ulemas

N
Nahdlatul Ulama, 10, 25, 105, 183
Nandi, 108
Nantong Plywood, 222
Nasir, Commander, 129–30
Nasser, Gamal Abdel, 24
Nasution, 24
Natalegawa, Marty, 117
Natalsya, Amrus, 216
nation and character building, 21, 26, 38
National Alliance for the Freedom of Faith and Religion (AKKBB), 188–9
National Awakening Party, 100, 190
National Agency for Placement and Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers, 226
National Monument, 188–9, 192, 198
National Security Archive, 124
Natong, Rudi, 97–8
Nazaruddin, 89, 149
Nehru, Jawaharlal, 24
neocolonialism, 14, 23, 25, 28, 114, 205, 219, 230
Netherlands Forensic Institute, 101
Neumann, A. Lin, 91–2, 194
Nevins, Joseph, 32, 43, 126
Newmont Corp., 55
New Intelligence Bill, 114
New Kolkata International Development Pvt Ltd (NKID), 221
New Order, 34, 37–9, 48, 82–3, 91, 106, 149–50, 202, 213, 218
New-New Order, 82
New York Times, 77
night of September 30th, cult of, 38
Nitisastro, Widjojo, 48
Nixon, Richard, 45–6, 65
Nobel Prize, 125, 211
Norilsk Nickel, 55
Northwestern University, 96
Norwegian Initiative, 168
Nowak, Manfred, 102
Nusantara, Bondan, 203

O
Obama, Barack, 9, 122, 198, 220
Occupy Wall Street protest, 94
Oegroseno, Arif Havas, 224
Oei, Jane Luyke, 22
Oetama, Jacob, 94
Okin, Morcos Lokis, 108
oligarchs/oligarchy, 47, 57, 96, 138, 219
pro-Western, 42
Operasi Seroja *see* Lotus Operation
Orba *see* New Order
Orde Baru *see* New Order
Orde Baru Baru *see* New-New Order
Our Man in Havana, 65
Outomona River, 46
Oxford, 116–17

P
Padjadjaran University, 77
Palembang, 69, 91, 149, 156–61, 178, 228–9
palm oil, 50, 52–3, 132–3, 135–6, 160, 162, 168
industry, 161
plantations, 135–6, 156, 161–2, 167–9, 219

'Palm Oil for People', 52
Paloh, Surya, 94
Palyja, PT, 48
Pancasila, 21, 189
Pangestu, Prajogo, 222
Paniai, 111
Papua, 2, 7, 9, 15, 40, 55, 68, 73, 77, 84–5, 88, 91, 100, 103, 106, 108, 110–12, 116–23, 127, 131, 134, 137, 141–2, 146, 181, 193, 198, 230
  Free Papua Movement, 118–20
  genocide in, 116
  International Lawyers for West Papua, 117
  Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate in, 118
  National Committee for West Papua, 116
Papua New Guinea (PNG), 65, 107–8, 222
Papuan
  Movement, 117
  People's Congress, 111
  Presidium Council, 122
  state, 110
Pasukan Raider *see* Raider Troops
Pasuruan, 197
PCC *see* People's Crisis Center
PDAM, 48
Pelni, 125,
Pemuda Ansor, 183
Penang, 68, 223
Pentagon, 33
People's Consultative Assembly, 8, 38
People's Crisis Center (PCC), 165
People's Cultural Institute, 75, 203
People's Daily, 141
Perkins, John, 219
perpetrator(s), 2, 77, 99, 102, 193–4, 200, 231
  of human rights crimes, 126
  of human rights violations, 77
  of mass rapes, 106
  of mob killing, 193
Peterpan, Ariel, 87
Petras, Jerry, 167
Philippines, 51, 142, 206, 219, 222
Picasso, Pablo, 187, 216
Pilger, John, 112, 117
pilkada, 80
Pinochet, Augusto, 46
Pitaloka, Rieke Dyah Ayu, 186
PKI (*Partai Komunis Indonesia*) *see* Indonesian Communist Party
Plaosan, 79
Pledge, Youth *see Sumpah Pemuda*
Poernomo, Didiek, 21
Pohan, Aulia, 149
pogroms, 112, 230
political
  Islam, 10
  project, 20
Pontianak, 133–4, 167
Pontoh, Zafrullah, 192
Pope, Allen, 24
Port Moresby, 65, 108
Portuguese, 17, 124
Portuguese Timor *see* Timor Leste
poverty
  alleviation, 139, 201
  eradication, 56, 227
  line, 57–8
  rates, 48, 55
  reduction, 56
PPR (*Partai Pembebasan Rakyat*), 116
PRA (*Partai Rakyat Aceh*) – Aceh People's Party, 131
Pram *see* Toer, Pramoedya Ananta
Prambanan, 79
PRD, 189, 215
press
  agencies, 80
  coverage, 80, 195, 197
  Indonesian, 13, 154, 176
  local, 69, 158
  see also media
Prijanto, Major-General, 76
privatization, 42, 48–9, 175
Priyanto, Pollycarpus Budihari, 101

Proletariati, Ribka Tjiptaning, 186
propaganda, 6, 27, 29, 33, 46, 86, 142, 223, 230–1
  anti-communist, 4, 32
  fascist, 8
  'New Order', 48
  state, 1, 53, 92
  system, 84
psychological
  game, 35
  help, 188
  journey, 35
  trauma, 30, 105
  warfare, 33
psychologists, 18, 30, 86
Public Discussion of Oligarchy and Corruption: Perspectives of Political–economy and Law, 96
Pudjanadi, Hardjija, 216
PUSDEP *see* Center for History and Political Ethics
Puskesmas, 179–80
Putra, Hermayani, 134–5, 137, 168
Putra Master, PT., 173
PWI (Indonesian Journalists Association), 93

R

Rachman, Fadjroel, 90
racial/racism/racist, 17, 110–11, 122, 124
  abuse, 88
  country, 111
  discrimination, 112–3
  hate messages/insults, 68, 88
  minority, 3, 88
  mob, 69
  unrest, 112
radical(s), 186, 192
  events, 2
  Islamist, 92, 191
  madrasa, 182
Raider Troops, 129
Raja Garuda Mas, 52
Ramage, Douglas, 41
ramayana, 61
Ransom, David, 46
Rao, Nagesh, 16–7
rape, 84, 86, 90, 100–1, 105–9
  of Chinese women, 107, 196
  gang-rape, 69, 107
  by the Indonesian armed forces, 118
  mass, 106, 112, 124–5
  of nature, 160
  systematic and institutionalized, 101
  'systematic, barbarous and sadistic', 107
  wave of, 109
Rasyid, Rafdian, 179
Rasyid, Ryaas, 81, 110, 148
Ravespot, 194
Red Beret, 74
Red Blood for Integration, 107
Red China, 113
Republic of South Maluku, 114
reformasi, 8, 49, 83, 209
religion
  bigoted, 183
  freedom of, 198
  minority, 10
  see also Catholics, Roman; Hindu; Islam, Muslim
religious
  cadres, 2, 28, 30, 33, 42, 112, 182, 186
  discrimination, 88, 182
  groups, 56, 87, 199
  hate messages, 88
  interests, 25, 95
  intolerance, 92
  intolerant majority, 88
  intolerant path, 86
  leaders, 4, 30, 186, 195, 198
  majority, 88, 101, 189, 213
  minority, 85, 88
  organizations, 12, 25
  riots, 82,
  violence, 99
Representative Assembly, People's (DPR), 8

Republic of South Maluku, 114
Reuters, 55, 132, 143, 154, 181
Rhodes, Cecil, 47
Riak Bumi, 132–3, 168
Rindaya Wood Processing, 222
Rivera, Diego, 216
Roesli, Imamsyah, 48
Romusha, 19
Roosa, John, 18, 32, 43, 89, 126
Rossieta, Hilda, 45
Rukmana, Siti Hardijanti, 141
Runaweri, Clemens, 121
Russia, 28, 44, 49–50, 218
  see also Soviet Union
Rustandi, Tatang, 149
Rwanda, 28, 53, 230

S
Saby, Yusny, 198
Saleh, Darwin Zahedy, 55
Salim Group, 221
Sambodo, Etty, 147
Sampoerna, Boedi, 149
Sampurna, 52
'Sanggar Bumi Tarung', 216, 218
Sanggau, 133, 135
Santa Cruz massacre, 78
Sauven, John, 170
SBY *see* Yudhoyono, Susilo Bambang
Secret History of the American Empire, The, 219
Seifert, Jaroslav, 216
Seiful, Srisetiowati, 70
self-censorship, 91
Senopati Nusantara, 172
Sese Seko, Mobutu, 142
SETARA *see* Institute for Democracy and Peace
SETIA *see* Arastamar Evangelical School of Theology
Setiawan, Hersri, 75
sexual violence, 109
Shadows Falls in the Heart of Java, A, 35, 204
sharia
  law, 10, 87, 90, 198
  Public Indecency Law, 109
  Wilayatul Hisah Shariah Police, 108
Shihab, Habib Rizieq, 189
Shing, Wong Kai, 194
Shock Doctrine, The, 32, 44, 184
'shock therapy', 42
'shooting lists', 34
Simfonia, Aula, 212
Simon, Dan, 202, 214
Sinarmas, 52
Siregar, Syamsir, 191
Sivaraman, Satya, 221
Sjam, Kamaruzaman, 37
Sjamsoeddin, Sjafrie, 78
Soedjono, Nusyirwan, 176–7
Soetoro, Lolo, 220
Solheim, Erik, 169
Solo, 5, 69, 113–14, 141, 193, 196, 204, 230
Somalia, 122
Sorbonne, 12, 32
Soviet Union, 11, 25, 52, 72, 184
  see also Russia
special forces, Indonesian *see* Kopassus
Stanvac, 43
State Logistic Agency, 148
statistics, 7, 53–8, 60, 102, 154, 172, 174–5, 179, 210, 226
  Central Statistics Agency, 58
  Jakarta Statistics Agency, 174
Stiglitz, Joseph, 45
Stolen Asset Recovery Initiative, 142
'structural adjustments', 47
Suara Gereja bagi Umat Tertindas: Penderitaan Tetesan Darah dan Cucuran Air Mata Umat Tuhan di Papua Barat Harus Diakhiri (The Voice of the Church for the Suffering of the Oppressed: The spilling blood and tears of God's people in Papua must be ended), 89

Subandrio, 21
Suharto, 2, 5–7, 9–10, 12–13, 19, 21, 25–9, 31–5, 37–9, 41–9, 52, 57, 59, 62, 73–5, 81, 84, 89, 95, 113, 121–4, 131, 135, 137–8, 140–4, 162, 183–4, 191, 204, 211, 215, 220–2, 230
  administration, 84
  anti-Suharto riots, 107
  army, 43
  case, 140
  charitable foundations, 143
  clique, 32, 43
  cronies, 43
  dictatorship, 9, 49, 86, 89, 164
  era, 39, 59, 105, 119, 139, 162, 209
  regime, 9, 13, 33, 96, 126, 143, 183, 202, 216
  Reichstag fire, 32
  massive corruption, 142
  military regime, 75
  New Order, 82–3, 91, 106, 149, 213
  propaganda, 27
  US-backed, 84
Suharto, Tien, 5
Suherman, Benny, 174
Sujarto, Djoko, 68
Sukanta, Putu Oka, 215
Sukarno, 10, 17, 20–1, 23–9, 31, 38, 44–5, 59, 68, 87, 209, 227
  dictatorship, 20
  era, 21, 27, 73, 183
Sukarnoputri, Megawati *see* Megawati
Sukayem, 80, 225
Sulami, 183
Sulawesi, 2, 48, 60, 100, 111, 118, 136, 153, 173, 198
Sulistya, Romo Dwinugraha, 196–7
Sumarsono, Susilo Hadi, 49
Sumatra, 2, 10, 14, 17–18, 24, 60, 79, 81, 94–5, 127, 132, 136, 152–3, 156–9, 161–3, 168, 171, 173, 175, 183, 211, 219, 228
Sumba, 60, 81
Sumbawa, 60, 81
Summit Against Violent Extremism (SAVE), 199
Sumpah Pemuda, 19
Sundari, Eva Kusuma, 54, 74, 97, 100, 190
Sungkari, Hari, 176
Sunni, 25, 183, 197
Supandji, Hendarman, 143, 189
Surabaya, 20, 27, 69, 73, 79, 90, 134, 154, 173, 197, 227
Surakarta *see* Solo
Surinaamse Weekkrant, 221
Surya Institute, 70
Sutanto, 191
Sutiyoso, 75–6
Sutowo, Adiguna, 97–9
Sutowo, Ibnu, 98
Syaikhu, Ahmad, 208–9
Sydney Morning Herald, 98, 106
Sydney Morning Tribune, 78
Syiah Kuala University, 131

T

Taiana, Jorge, 139
Tait, Andy, 170
Tamrin, Misbach, 216
Tansil, Eddie, 99
tax holidays, 42, 45
'Team Susi', 76
Teater Besar, 69
Teater Kecil, 69
Telegraph, Daily, 3
Telegraph, The, 114
Temanggung, 195–6
Tempo Group, 94
Tempo magazine, 82, 93, 143–4, 215
Terlena – Breaking of a Nation, 30, 34, 37, 112, 148, 183, 202
terror, 11, 32, 35, 198, 220
  activities, 78
  campaign of, 118
  orgy of, 15, 28
  religious, 198

subconscious, 7
terrorism, 122, 139
terrorists, hardline Islamic, 182
Teterisa, Johan, 114
Thailand, 12–13, 47, 51–2, 146, 172, 206, 210–11, 219–20, 222–3
Thames Water, 48–9
TI *see* Transparency International
Tiaka island, 111
TIM (Taman Ismail Marzuki), 69
Time magazine, 143
Timika, 111, 119–20
Timor Leste, 2, 7, 9, 15, 74–8, 84, 88–9, 106–7, 112, 117–18, 122–3, 125–7, 130, 136, 141–2, 193, 230
Titi Ajeng, 212
Tjakrabirawa, 29
TNI *see* Indonesian National Armed Forces
Toer, Pramoedya Ananta, 9, 16, 19, 21, 24, 29, 31, 46, 59, 82, 89, 95, 138, 184, 202, 207, 218, 231
Tokyo, 69, 92, 144, 203
tolerant/tolerance, 39, 184, 190
  followers of Islam, 199
  Islam, 190
  Muslim state, 10
  nation, 107, 198
  and secular society, 198
  state, 182
Tong, 'Dr' Stephen, 213
torture, 2, 4, 31, 33, 35, 37, 46, 55, 75, 84–6, 90, 99, 100–4, 106, 108, 118, 122, 124, 129, 132, 193, 216, 226
  as standard operating procedure for interrogations, 33
  Association for the Prevention of Torture Asia–Pacific, 101
  Committee Against Torture, 103
  Report of the UN Rapporteur on Torture, 102
  sadistic, 106
trafficking, 87
Trafficking in Persons, 87
Trans-Migration, 119
Transparency International, 139, 146
Tremblay, Philippe, 101
tribunal, 77, 126
  international, 86, 117, 126
  United Nations-backed, 77
Trihatmodjo, Bambang, 49
Trisakti University, 12, 230
Trisnowati, Eris, 179
Truth and Reconciliation, 75
  Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in Timor–Leste (CAVR), 85, 107
Tumiso, 22
Tunggul Ametung, 31

U
Ubud, 61–4, 222
Uddin, Jurnalis, 105
UMKM (micro, small and medium-sized businesses), 54
United Kingdom, 22
United Nations (UN), 76, 89, 106, 121, 125, 142, 152
  -backed tribunal, 77
  Development Programme (UNDP), 168, 229
  Human Rights Commission, 106
  UNESCO, 53, 79, 161
  UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees), 107
  UNTAET (United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor), 125
United States (USA), 11, 20, 22–4, 26, 32, 37, 44, 57, 71, 82, 84–7, 118, 120, 123–5, 141, 178, 183, 191, 198, 210, 219–20
  Agency for International Development (USAID),166
Uruguay, 44, 56

V
Vale BHP Billiton, 55
Vallejo, Camilla, 209
victims, 2, 4, 18, 23, 30–1, 35, 65, 81, 86, 92, 98–9, 102–3, 106, 108–9, 113–4, 122, 124, 126–7, 138, 144–5, 153–4, 164–5, 188–9, 194, 197, 221, 231
of human rights crimes, 85
of sexual assault and rape, 106–7
victimhood, 3, 231
victimization, 4, 81, 101, 205, 221
Vietnam, 13, 27, 51–2, 66, 94, 110, 123, 146–7, 151, 222, 233
violence, 3, 16, 62, 77–8, 80, 109, 111, 132, 136, 182, 187, 194–6, 199, 205
against dissenters, 121
against women, 104, 106
at the National Monument, 198
East Timor, 127
religious, 99
sexual, 109
see also genocide, killing, murder, rape, torture
Von Hayek, Friedrich, 43, 45, 140

W
Wahhabism, 10
Wahid, Abdurrahman, 12, 40, 81, 147–8, 183, 186, 198, 200
Wahyono, TriDjoko, 210
WALHI *see* environment, Indonesian forum for
Wanodja Binangkit, 218
Wardaya, Baskara T., 37, 199
Washington Post, 182
Waty, Salma, 131, 166
Wechselman, Maj, 106
Wenas, Sylvia Amelia, 6
Western mass media, 10, 87, 125
Wibowo, Harry, 207
Wibowo, Sarwo Edhie, 74
Widjaya, Anton P., 167
Wieringa, Saskia, 206
Wijayani, Isna, 94, 157, 228
Wikileaks, 37, 191
Wilders, Geert, 88
Wing, John, 120–1, 146
Winters, Jeffrey, 96
Wiranto, Gen. (ret.), 2, 76–7, 126
Wirjawan, Gita, 42
Wisono, Bambang, 150
women's rights, 9, 90, 103–4
Islam and Women's Rights Information Center, 104
Women and The Generals, The, 24, 106, 183
Woolcott, Richard, 123
World Bank, 23–4, 51, 57, 59–60, 71, 89, 140, 142–3, 181
2010 Logistic Performance Index, 51
World Heritage sites, 68, 79, 161, 233
World War, Second, 19, 39, 124
WWF, 134, 168

Y
Yani, 29
YAPI Islamic Boarding School, 197
Yasui, Shin, 46
Yogi, Valiant Budi, 226
Yoman, Cocratez Sofyan, 89
Yudhoyono, Susilo Bambang, 2, 8, 58, 74, 77–8, 87, 90, 97, 111, 114, 126, 142–3, 145, 148–9, 189, 192, 198, 215
Yuliantri, Rhoma Dwi Aria, 89
Yuntho, Emerson, 224

Z
Zanzibar, 68
Zongganau, Willem, 121

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1. KETUHANAN YANG MAHA ESA
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ANDRE VLTCHEK is a novelist, investigative journalist and filmmaker. He is the author of a number of books including *Oceania* (2009) and *Western Terror: From Potosi to Baghdad* (2006).

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